

***REPRESENTATIONS OF VIOLENCE IN  
CONTEMPORARY SPANISH CINEMA***

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by

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## ***Representations of Violence in Contemporary Spanish Cinema***

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This thesis seeks to develop a new framework for analysing portrayals of violence in recent Spanish cinema, based on interdisciplinary studies of violence and textual analysis. Taking into account different types of violence, my research examines the aesthetics of violence through its different representations in Spanish society and film. These will include social films dealing with current topics such as domestic violence and immigration, as well as violent film genres such as war films, psycho-killer films and certain sub-genres of adolescent cinema, all of which will be identified through a corpus of contemporary Spanish films. By means of detailed analysis of this corpus, I aim to demonstrate that cinematic violence in Spanish cinema is a very complex phenomenon, which is shaped by what can be summarised as the following six factors: genre characteristics, narrative, social and ideological dimensions, stylistic choices, industry (different contexts of production), and audiences.

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## *Chapter One*

### *Introduction to the Concept of Violence: Definitions and Portrayals in Media and Cinema*

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Violence in film is as old as the cinema itself. From early film history in its various forms, it has been always present. Masters of the cinema such as Fritz Lang or Alfred Hitchcock frequently portrayed violence in their narratives. As far back as the silent film age, Spaniards Salvador Dalí and Luis Buñuel shocked audiences with their violent images in *Un chien andalou* (1929), demonstrating how, even then, violence could be at the vanguard of culture while simultaneously courting controversy as a means of attracting attention. Nowadays, many film directors present an increasingly spectacular violence, more and more influenced by genre in order to make their films more appealing to audiences. According to media scholar David Trend, these audiences are sometimes seduced by certain representations of violence (2007: 39). But spectacle and feeding audience demands are not the only uses film-makers have made of violence. Film can use violence as a representation or symptom of social ills or political conflict.

In an attempt to examine these varied representations of violence, this thesis seeks to develop a new framework for analysing portrayals of violence in recent Spanish cinema, based on interdisciplinary studies of violence and textual analysis. Taking into account different types of violence, my research examines the aesthetics of violence in Spanish film and the extent to which this filmic

representations might reflect Spanish society and culture. The selected corpus includes social films dealing with current topics such as domestic violence and immigration, as well as inherently violent film genres such as war films, psycho-killer films and certain sub-genres of adolescent cinema, all of which will be illustrated through a corpus of contemporary Spanish films. By means of detailed analysis of this corpus, I aim to demonstrate that cinematic violence in Spanish cinema is a very complex phenomenon, which is shaped by what can be summarised as the following six factors: genre characteristics, narrative, social and ideological dimensions, stylistic choices, industry (different contexts of production), and audiences.

This introductory chapter presents a review of various definitions of violence, exploring different perspectives informed by differing academic disciplines, critical approaches and, sometimes, ideological positions. Thereafter, I look at general concepts of representations of violence in American cinema (the dominant industry model), and the debate on the effects of violence in media and cinema. Following this, I review the presence of violence in Spanish cinema, and finally give an outline of the remaining chapters.

Three films will be examined in each chapter to illustrate the topics I will cover. This number of films per chapter allows for close analysis rather than adopting a survey and quantitative approach within which it would not be possible to analyse the films in detail. Conversely, a lower number of films in the corpus would not be sufficient to undertake a comparative analysis, making it more

difficult to identify trends and variations across a representative range of films. When relevant, I will also refer to other contemporary Spanish films.

To start with some general definitions of violence, even basic dictionary definitions point to a wide variety of interpretations of the term. The *Oxford Dictionary* (online edition) defines violence as ‘The exercise of physical force so as to inflict injury on, or cause damage to, persons or property; action or conduct characterised by this; treatment or usage tending to cause bodily injury or forcibly interfering with personal freedom’. The definition of violence here focuses on actions which involve physical damage towards any person, thereby neglecting the potential for psychological manifestations of violence and its effects on victims.

More vague definitions are found in the most respected Spanish dictionary, *Diccionario de la Real Academia* in its twenty-second edition, with four explanations<sup>2</sup>:

1. Quality of being violent
2. Action and effect of being violent.
3. Violent action against the natural way to proceed.
4. Action of raping a woman.

While the first two of these definitions are unproblematic and largely equate to the ones from the Oxford Dictionary Online, definitions 3 and 4 are interesting in what they reveal about cultural and even moral value judgements.

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<sup>2</sup> Unless otherwise stated, all translations from Spanish into English are mine.

The idea of violence against nature could be read as extremely paradoxical, given that many would argue that violence *is* a natural trait in human beings. Also interesting is the fact that in the fourth category violence is defined as an act of rape inflicted on women (not men), indicating a traditional and sexist social attitude that this dictionary embodies when defining this term. It is true, nonetheless, that the study of violence in cinema also attests to the fact that women are, more often than men, the victims of violent acts, and not only those which are sexually violent. The dichotomy between psychological and physical violence is recognised in academic writing on the media and academic writing on film. However, the main focus of these studies has been physical and explicit violence. Psychological violence is a more abstract concept, and one often neglected by academics. In this thesis, representations of both physical and psychological violence will be considered in the analysis of the corpus.

Spanish historian Julio Aróstegui affirms that there are three types of violence in our societies (1994: 22). The first is related to social and power structures, in which injustice and social inequalities are present in our world. This means that for example, racism can be considered a type of structural violence in our modern cultures and one that in the context of film will also be analysed later in this thesis. The second definition is a type of violence in which physical violence is the main focus, which leads to a more reductionist vision of the concept of violence, such as can be seen in more than one of the chapters of this thesis. Finally, the third type of violence is a socially or politically legitimised one in which violent acts are not considered violent if they are legitimate acts under

their respective legal systems. In other words, some violent acts which were not considered violent fifty years ago in a given country or political system might be so considered now. For example, the death penalty, which could be considered the most extreme and most symbolic form of politically legitimised violence, was abolished as late as 1978 in Spain.

Sociologist Dorothy Van Soest offers a slightly different categorization of violence based on what is seen or unseen, in other words, what type of violence is more visible or invisible for us. She argues that there are three main categories: individual violence, structural and cultural violence, and institutional violence (1997: 13). When she refers to individual violence, she defines the concept as harmful actions (physical or psychological) towards people and objects, a type of violence in which aggressors and victims are not difficult to identify. In contrast, structural and cultural violence, and institutional violence are types of violence which are less seen, and are more difficult to recognise as they might be embedded in cultural values which are widely accepted by current society. For Van Soest, structural and cultural violence are harmful actions which stem from the way societies 'think'. For example, this might refer to any kind of discrimination based on race, religion, or sexual orientation, which in some societies are accepted as 'normal' (1997: 12-3). This has also been called symbolic violence by philosopher Pierre Bourdieu (2001: 50). Finally, institutional violence refers to the use of violence by institutions in states, for example, genocide, death penalty, wars, corruption, and mistreatment, amongst other categories (Van Soest, 1997: 13). Spanish philosopher Fernando Savater

also looks at institutional violence in the complex context of the Basque country and its nationalisms, claiming that institutional violence (the violence of the state) and non-institutional violence (the violence of illegal terrorist groups) nourish each other because, he argues, they are mutually dependent and their ideological claims are identical (Savater, 1984: 97). These categories appear in different forms in the Spanish films to be analysed in the following chapters.

When addressing the study of violence, one of the most debated topics is its biological origins. Beginning with the theories of Charles Darwin (1809-1882), most scientific studies of violent behaviour focused on its instinctive and biologically driven causes. From the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, Sigmund Freud (1859-1939), the founder of psychoanalysis from which much modern psychological theory stems, argued that all human and nonhuman creatures, are born with powerful aggressive instincts (1907/1959). Freud also linked aggression to instinctual repression as ‘the child’s ego has to content itself with the unhappy role of the authority - the father’ (1962: 322). Freud’s successors, however, increasingly recognised the importance of environment (family, class, culture etc.) on development, and this has contributed to a more integrated approach to the study of all behaviours, an approach which focuses on not only biological features, but also behaviours learned through life experience.

Nobel prize winner Konrad Lorenz focuses on the biological study of violence, and argues that the fight for survival of human nature is the main cause for contemporary violence (1966: x). In other words, innate and biological features are the main ones which should be considered when studying violence.

Such studies reinforce the belief that there is a potential predisposition to violent acts in all people, which becomes an actual (and sometimes acted upon) predisposition in some people (Aran et al. 2001: 25). A contrary view is expressed by one of the main scholars of biological studies of violence, Berkowitz. He concluded that it is scientifically wrong to say that violent behaviour is genetically programmed in human nature, insisting that every individual perceives violence in a different way which may also affect their behaviour in terms of aggressiveness (1996: 404). Within the film corpus of this thesis, both socially inflected violence and innate violence will be exemplified.

In contrast to instinct-based theories of the origins of violence, biological factors have been questioned by behaviourist theorists such as Bandura who points out how important it is to consider the context in which aggressors learn to behave in a violent way. According to him, violence is learnt behaviour which can be positively or negatively reinforced depending on the contexts in which the aggressors find themselves (1997: 14).

In *The Anthropology of Violence*, David Riches points out that ‘violence is understood best when it is examined over a range of cultural settings, and in a full variety of social situations’ (1986: vii). What can be considered legitimate or illegitimate violence in the Anglo-Saxon context could be different in other non-western societies<sup>3</sup>. In this book, Riches compiles a series of articles (by several authors) which deal with violence in other cultural environments. One example is the case of the bloody episode of the Andalusian village called Casas Viejas in

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<sup>3</sup> For example, ritual violence in Uganda: the practise of female circumcision among the Gisu people.

which the anarchist union called Confederación Nacional del Trabajo (National Confederation of Labour) rose in revolt ‘to abolish the state and establish liberal communism’ in January 1933 during the Second Republic in Spain. In this event, three policemen were killed and in revenge twenty-one inhabitants in the village were killed. Anthropologist John Corbin establishes that honour, which is a key component in Mediterranean anthropology, played a significant role in this event (Corbin, 1986: 31).

Corbin establishes a distinction between conflict and violence and notes that ‘violence differs from conflict in that violence is about structures of integrity while conflict is about structures of control. The two are related in that violence may be a tactic in conflict, and in that control itself may violate the integrity of those controlled’ (1986: 31). In other words, conflict is an element which should be considered in the analysis of violence; however, conflict itself does not explain why a violent act has emerged. In addition, there is a close link between violence and structures of power and control, whether political, social or interpersonal control. Nevertheless, this does not mean that violence is always used when exercising power over a society or individuals, but it is an element which might be used together with power. Bearing in mind this definition, Corbin considered that in the episode of *Casas viejas*, conflict was derived into violence since there were attacks aimed at establishing political control in which honour played an important role in the Spanish context of the time. The type of state-approved violence that Corbin analysed in his study arguably reached its peak in the institutionalised violence of Franco’s dictatorship. Both these examples show that

violence also depends on specific cultural aspects and what caused a violent action in this context may not have had the same result in another cultural context, or would not have had the same outcome at another time.

José Sanmartín, the director of the Queen Sofia Centre for the Study of Violence in Valencia (Spain), combines cultural and biological aspects in his definition of violence: 'Violence is the result of the interaction between natural aggression and culture. Violence is a specifically human feature which can be shown in intentional actions (or threatening actions) which tend to cause harm towards other people' (2000: 26-7). In other words, the term aggression is related to our biological features, whilst violence is more related to the social environment. A person who is not aggressive in his nature might become violent due to social and cultural influences.

Psychologists Robert Baron and Deborah Richardson offer a good definition of aggression which summarises some of the aspects raised in this section:

Aggression may be defined as any form of behaviour directed toward the goal of harming or injuring another living being who is motivated to avoid such treatment. This definition encompasses a number of complex issues, including (1) the assumptions that aggression must involve voluntary or intentional harm to the victim; (2) that only behaviour meant to harm or injure living organisms can be viewed as aggression; and (3) that victims must be motivated to avoid such treatment (2004: 37).

This definition considers not only the aggressor's point of view, but also the victim's. It includes the concept of the intentionality of causing harm or injury, and furthermore, the psychological and physical damage caused by a violent act. Therefore, it is important to consider the aggressor's and victim's points of view

and the different ways of portraying psychological and physical violence perspectives when addressing a study of the representations of violence, something which will be also studied here when analysing the corpus. Intentionality is another aspect of violence which should be considered. It is not only Sanmartín who believes that intentionality is an essential aspect of this definition. Psychiatrist Luis Rojas Marcos argues that the intention of causing harm is present in aggressive behaviour. In his own words, this intentionality aims to ‘harm, abuse, rob, humiliate, outrage, torture, destroy or kill’ and he establishes that all these elements co-occur with intense emotional feelings (1996: 11).

The psychological effects of any act of aggression could affect mental health and therefore, cause additional violent actions by individuals or collectives (Reinares, 1998: 821). Such reactive violence can be seen, for example, in characters under extreme duress as in the war films studied in this thesis. Physical harm normally goes hand in hand with psychological mistreatment, and therefore, physical and psychological violence are inextricably linked, as will be studied, for instance, in the case of domestic violence in Spanish cinema. Other cultural variables should be considered in the study of violence, variables which may determine certain aggressive behaviours. For example, concepts of masculinity and honour codes, some of which are deeply engrained in Spanish society, may determine the violent behaviour of abusers in the context of domestic violence.

Representations of violence also change depending on the contexts in which they are represented: e.g. newspapers, television, etc. Sociologist Gerard Imbert points out that the way violence has been represented has also changed,

and social discourses such as the media also manipulate and present the concept through a series of social and cultural filters which vary depending on the time (1992: 95). He affirms that:

Violence has become, as a means of representation, an accepted speech...But the question is not in a mimetic relationship: violent acts are not made because violent actions are seen in the mass media. It is not a question of simple imitation. Violent acts are committed so easily because the same awareness of what is or is not violent does not exist and, consequently, the awareness of what people can do or not do, boundaries between the real violence and the represented violence, and between reality and fantasy have been diluted (1992: 95).

What Imbert claims is that violence is represented by the different social discourses such as the media. They distort reality and will portray violence in fictional worlds which do not necessarily reflect the reality of society, for example, in terms of character portrayals or context. Films are also a part of such social discourses and therefore, they depict violence in different ways, as will be established in the following chapters. Here, Imbert is addressing the issue of media effects which will be covered in the next section of this chapter.

To summarise, different scientific perspectives have tried to analyse the concept of violence according to their field of study. Sociologists will focus on the study of violence in social groups and therefore, with a wider concept of violence. Psychologists will focus on human behaviour and how this behaviour has been learnt by the aggressors, and biologists will focus on innate features which make the person violent. All these approaches will remain influential in the analysis of violence in the context of film and media studies.

This thesis takes the American cinema as its reference point for a number of reasons<sup>4</sup>. The cinema of the USA has been for a century the dominant industrial model in the world. The spectacular nature of much screen violence has also been led by the American film industry, as audiences worldwide have continued to demand more and more spectacle, of which violence is a key element. A consequence of both these factors is that much of the existing academic and journalistic writing on screen violence has been dedicated to American cinema. As will be demonstrated in the final section of this chapter – and, indeed, by the case studies which follow in the remaining chapters – an increasing awareness of audiences and markets for Spanish cinema has tended to bring Spanish films even closer to an American industrial model. This further justifies a comparison with the US cinema.

In his pioneering volume on violence in American cinema, Slocum argues American cinema has always been violent (2001: 15). But he, like others, has questioned whether it is more violent than any other. Although violence has always been present in American cinema, it is also a universal feature in other national cinemas. Representations of violence have varied over the decades depending on historical, national, cultural and production contexts, and these representations also impact on stylistic features. Distinctions between European and American cinemas have been established, with critics like Sanchis arguing that ‘the American directors have always preferred to emphasise the spectacular

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<sup>4</sup> Throughout this thesis, I will use the term ‘American cinema’ as shorthand for the cinema culture of the USA. Whilst many of the examples are Hollywood productions - in the broadest sense of the term - I will also be citing films made more independently. Even with independent films, though, the influence of Hollywood is still apparent.

narrative whilst the European [films] seem to be anchored in their cultural tradition. European directors have tended to think about the causes of violence, its evolution and meaning' (1996: 12). Whilst recognising that some of the features of contemporary Spanish cinema are truly national and culturally specific, many of the features of the corpus analysed here could indeed be seen as representative of a European style and sensibility. However, at least as many can be attributed to an increasingly global film industry dominated by an industrial US-based model.

Sanchis is right when he claims that various traditions have established differences in terms of screening violence. However, my contention is that European cinemas are not less violent, but rather that those representations of violence are different due to the various cinematic traditions depending on the divergent contexts, which are themselves contingent on historical, geographical, cultural and commercial factors. For instance, German expressionism did not represent violence in the same way as did American films at the time, but that did not mean that such European films were less violent than their American counterparts. A good example of this is the work of Fritz Lang, whose films portray violence mainly present in the narrative and emphasised by the characteristic *mise-en-scène* of his films (*chiaroscuro* lighting effects and dark cityscape). This is exemplified in *M* (1931), a film which tells the story of a child murderer and serial killer from Düsseldorf and which was Lang's first sound film.

Comparisons between American and European cinema have often focused on stylistic differences. But the study of film style has not been prominent in work on screen violence, given that – as will be shown in the next section – the social

effects of violence have constituted a greater concern for writers. In a brief but thorough article entitled 'Why do film scholars ignore movie violence' Stephen Prince argues that scholars tend to focus on the analysis of film text from perspectives mainly related to literary studies. He affirms that violence is represented in different ways nowadays in terms of stylistic features:

In early cinema history, it was the referencing of criminal activity that generated controversy rather than violent stylization; today, arguably, it is style rather than referentiality that is the problem. There were plenty of shootings in the 1932 gangster film *Scarface*, but they were quick and were shown in long shots from a distance. By contrast, the 1983 remake played its shootings and dismemberment up close and in the viewer's face. The stylistics of mayhem in current films pump violence full of visual and audio grandiloquence, making it hypnotic, insistent, inescapable' (2001: B19).

This supports the idea that films were not less violent in earlier times, but rather stylisation has changed over the years, taking into account the cultural, historical and technological factors which have altered the industry in the last decades. Prince concludes that in order better to understand cinematic violence, film academia will need to combine different methodologies and have interdisciplinary perspectives from several social disciplines together with film studies. The aim of my study is to integrate the analysis of film texts and their stylistic features with a combination of different approaches taken from film studies, media studies and social science.

Carter and Weaver, in their article 'Fears of film', seek to demonstrate how any one film portrayal of violence is 'intricately bound to the specific social and cultural conditions of its production and reception' (2003: 69). Their examples focus on diverse films such as *The Great Train Robbery* (Edwin Porter,

1903), and *The Birth of a Nation* (D.W. Griffith, 1915). They also argue that in the 1950s, the violence portrayed in films was not gratuitous but was in fact used as ‘an expression of social and moral tension in film narratives’ (2003: 52) as in films such as *Rebel Without a Cause* (Nicholas Ray, 1955) and *Kiss Me Deadly* (Robert Aldrich, 1955). They consider that an important change in American film violence came in 1967, after which there was a shift of emphasis towards a more spectacle-motivated and stylised violence (2003: 53). This was due mainly to the 1966 revision of the Motion Picture Association of America (MPAA) production code which had restricted certain types of explicit representations of violence from the early 1930s. This also allowed film-makers to start a trend of extreme violence in cinema. According to Prince, this revision was the genesis of ultraviolence in American cinema (2000: 6) as film-makers were not told how to shoot violent sequences, but rather cautioned to exercise discretion in the ways they portrayed graphic violence (2000: 6). Also during 1960s, the MPAA ‘aimed to bring films into closer accord with the youth audience and its general principle of Establishment values’ (Prince, 2000: 8). Therefore, this code was responding to audience desire for ever-increasing violence. However, the influence of contemporary social and political issues on American cinema did not disappear altogether despite the trend towards spectacle. And Prince also points out that in addition to the audience other social elements shape this new era of American cinema, for example ‘the climate of political violence’ at the time of the Vietnam War.

Films like *Bonnie and Clyde* (Arthur Penn, 1967) or *The Dirty Dozen* (Robert Aldrich, 1967) provoked a controversy over film violence and in 1968 the MPAA introduced a new Code and Rating Administration system for the exhibition of films (Carter and Weaver, 2003: 55). According to Carter and Weaver the first film which challenged this code was Sam Peckinpah's *The Wild Bunch* (1969). This indeed represented a radical change in terms of stylisation, with highly stylised scenes in which a bloody battle for example, is shown in slow motion (Carter and Weaver, 2003: 55, Iturrate and González, 2003: 481).

Other films in the 1960s and 1970s which represented this trend towards stylisation were *Night of the Living Dead* (George A. Romero, 1968), *Dirty Harry* (Don Siegel, 1971) and *The Godfather* (Francis Ford Coppola, 1972). As Carter and Weaver point out, 'the spectacle of violence was central to the narrative' (2003: 55). Finally, in the last part of their article they focus their attention on the 1990s films such as *Reservoir Dogs* (Quentin Tarantino, 1992), *Pulp Fiction* (Quentin Tarantino, 1994), *Natural Born Killers* (Oliver Stone, 1994), *Henry: Portrait of a Serial Killer* (John McNaughton, 1986), *Kalifornia* (Dominic Sena, 1993), *American Psycho* (Mary Harron, 2000). All these films, especially *Henry: Portrait of a Serial Killer*, and *Natural Born Killers*, sparked a re-emergence of debates on the effect of violence since they showed it in extreme graphic depictions (2003: 68). At the end of the article, the two authors conclude that

cinematic depictions of violence cannot be considered simply as entertainment. Film representations of violence are intrinsically connected to the social, cultural, economic and institutional ideologies of their production and reception. What is extraordinary about the evident acceptability of so much film violence is that censorship laws deter against

the explicit depiction of consenting sex, but permit the screening of explicit and graphic violence (2003: 69).

In this thesis, I will investigate whether representations of violence in recent Spanish cinema can be considered simply as entertainment and to what extent these representations are close to the cultural and economic contexts of production and reception.

Neil Fulwood demonstrates in his book *One Hundred Violent Films that Changed Cinema* that violence has played an important role throughout the history of world cinema. Fulwood divides his book into several sections in which he shows how auteur and commercial films coexist in the film industry. For instance, he looks at the serial killer Hannibal Lecter in *The Silence of the Lambs* (Jonathan Demme, 1991), whose character differs from the caricature psychopathic murderer of most violent films, with a psychologically rounded and complex characterisation, that is more usually found in auteurist cinemas. In a departure from normative characterisation of villains, he becomes a more appealing character who captivates the female policeman managing his case (2003: 65). Such complex human characterisation is a feature in the films studied in Chapter Five.

In the section on *The Wild Bunch*, Fulwood also admits that Peckinpah inspired Japanese director Kurosawa in the use of slow-motion footage (2003: 16), and therefore, this film transformed the aesthetics of violence at that time. Although this is an interesting study, Fulwood does not seem to reach any general conclusion about violence, although he raises some good points in the evolution

of violence throughout film history. Rather, he ends by taking a moralistic point of view and warning us of our responsibility as spectators and of the responsibility of directors in the portrayal of violence. He also argues that excessive portrayal can lead to young people imitating this violence (2003: 136), an issue that is covered in the next section.

Like all national cinemas, Spanish cinema has been influenced by American and European cinemas, but in terms of violence, it is interesting how these intercontinental influences have fed through. Marsha Kinder's article on the transnational portrayal of violence in the *The Wild Bunch* and *La caza* (Carlos Saura, 1966) sheds light on this issue and demonstrates that transnational influences on the portrayal of violence are a recurrent feature. If film director John Woo was inspired by Peckinpah's stylisation of violence, Peckinpah was inspired in turn by *La caza* in the portrayal of the orchestration of violence. As Kinder argues, Carlos Saura uses violence as a feature to represent the Spanish Civil War and its consequences. Saura's film relates the story of four men whose initial hunting camaraderie turns into a murderous explosion of resentment and settling of scores. The film has been read as an allegory of the tensions within the Franco regime and of the legacy of the Civil War. Its violent representations were highly stylised and metaphorical since this film was shot under conditions of the dictatorship and censorship (Kinder, 2001: 64). In addition, she argues that 'this narrative orchestration of violence – with its varied rhythms, dramatic pauses, and cathartic climax' (Kinder, 2001: 65) had an important impact on Peckinpah. After the controversy of *The Wild Bunch*, Peckinpah pointed out that this film 'is about

the violence within all of us....The violence which is a reflection on the political condition of the world today. It serves a dual purpose. I intended it to have a cathartic affect. Someone may feel a strange, sick exultation at the violence, but he should then ask himself, "What is going on in my heart? I wanted to achieve a catharsis through pity and fear"(Peckinpah in Hayes, 2008: xiii).

Peckinpah was a director who introduced new features in the western genre. In this regard, generic elements are linked with the representations of violence. Lichtenfeld in his analysis of the action film, a genre which, despite its popularity has been traditionally neglected in academic studies, argues that this genre is intrinsically linked to violence since these films introduce the spectacularity and excess of violence (2007: 280). He also points out that sometimes an analysis of the violence in these films reduces the study of action films to this single aspect. Hence, he considers that 'the well-written, well-performed action film offers its audience more than suspense and excitement' (2007: 281). Therefore, the analysis of violence is not only related to the new development of stylistic devices but also is linked with genre features and the cultural, cinematic, social and political context of the time, aspects which will be considered throughout this study.

Kinder also analyses how American cinema has been also been influenced by representations of violence taken from Hong Kong cinema in Jackie Chan's films. Hence, she concludes that not only have national cinemas been influenced by representations of violence from Hollywood cinema, but also that American cinema has been influenced by representations of violence from other national

cinemas (Kinder, 2001: 96). These continuous ‘transcultural borrowings’ shape the portrayal of violence in world cinemas, and demonstrate that hybridity is one of the main characteristics in the elaboration of representations of violence.

Another different perspective is the one taken by Goldstein who focuses his study on the reasons why we watch violent entertainment. He points out that adolescent boys generally prefer violent entertainment (1998: 214). However, that does not mean they only like violent entertainment. In other words, violence should be studied taking into consideration the audience as well as the representations of violence. Moreover, representations of violence should take into consideration these elements, but also the production and cultural contexts. Goldstein points out that ‘both the context of violent images themselves and the circumstances in which they are experienced play crucial roles in their appeal’ (1998: 219). He gives some examples, for instance, the fact that people who go to see horror films have certain expectations of the portrayal of violence, which is linked with the generic features of the film (1998: 219). In terms of representations of violence, the importance of genre expectations and how these are related to the adolescent audience is also covered in a later chapter of this study.

This thesis does not aim to address the potential harmful effects of violent images on sections of the general public, along the lines of ‘media effects’ quantitative research. Rather, it is principally a textual and contextual study. However, the cinema is very much a market-driven industry aimed primarily at entertainment and therefore having to respond to (as well as shape) audience

demand. Some types of cinema (more than others) can be seen as a relatively directly reflecting the interests and tastes of cinema-goers. As such, the audience cannot, therefore, be disregarded. Consequently, this study is more about the effects of audiences on films, than it is about the effects of films on audiences.

The debate on violence and film is continuously discussed in all kinds of contexts, and the debate about the effects of violence in the media has been ongoing throughout the twentieth century, especially in recent decades, and still at the beginning of the twenty first century this question remains a key debate in contemporary societies. There is a lack of consensus among scientific disciplines studying violence, as every discipline takes a different approach (Busquet, 2003: 37). However, there is agreement that a combination of factors may shape violent behaviours (Huesmann, 1998: 102). I will briefly review some of the theories which have emerged since the beginning of the twentieth century.

The first approach which appears at the beginning of the twentieth century focused on the possible innate predispositions of individuals. Grisolia points out that 'every child is genetically programmed to react and learn since the first hours of their life' (1998: 35). In other words, there are biological factors which can create predispositions towards, for example, violent behaviour in some humans. Such factors may be the result of either functions of the brain or genetic predispositions.

A second perspective on the study of violence was the behaviourist position in psychology which pointed out the importance of the process of learning aggressive behaviours. Psychologist Anderson argues that media

violence increases the aggressive and violent behaviour of youth. Violence, he argues,

produces short-term increases by priming existing aggressive scripts and cognitions, increasing physiological arousal, and triggering an automatic tendency to imitate observed behaviours. Media violence produces long-term effects via several types of learning processes leading to the acquisition of lasting (and automatically accessible) aggressive scripts, interpersonal schemas, and aggression-supporting beliefs about social behaviour, and by reducing individuals' normal negative emotional responses to violence (i.e. desensitization) (Anderson et al. 2003: 81).

Nowadays, it seems that the scientific communities support an interdisciplinary approach in which biological and environmental factors are considered in order to explain human violence.

Other perspectives like the one taken by Imbert in his book *Los escenarios de la violencia* points out that violence is so much present in the mass media that we find 'a culture of violence' in our current societies. He argues that this 'culture of violence' is learnt throughout our lives, creating a predisposition towards violent behaviour. He points out that from childhood, conflict is found in the context of school, family and the city. The media is considered part of that culture of violence in which communication is an essential tool in our current societies. Whilst in the past old myths justified some kinds of aggression and conflicts, nowadays it is about the survival of 'new tribal rites of mass cultures, those who crowd with almost religious zeal into department stores, culture centres, hypermarkets of art and food, sport centres, Olympic stadiums...seized by the rage of consumers' (Imbert, 1992: 29).

With regard to myths which have been assimilated by our society, a book entitled *The 11 Myths of Media Violence* deals with specific beliefs and myths that our societies create regarding the effects of media violence. Here, James Potter challenges myths such as the assertion that ‘the media are not responsible for the negative effects of their violent messages’, or that ‘the media are only responding to market desires’, ‘there is too much violence in the media’, or that ‘violence in the media reflects violence in society’ (Potter, 2003: xviii). In other words, in order to demonstrate that scientific communities tend to simplify these studies depending on their respective approaches, he dismantles the arguments made by those who espouse dogmatic beliefs in relation to these myths.

One of the myths he analyses is the belief on the part of individuals, when questioned, that violence in the media does not affect them, but puts others at high risk (Potter, 2003: 31). He rejects this statement since there are indeed behavioural, emotional and physiological negative effects on the spectator and mentions that all of us should be aware of these possible negative effects. Desensitisation, emotional habituation, cultivation of fear and excitation transfer are among a long list of possible harmful effects (2003: 33).

When Potter studies the myth that ‘violence in the media reflects violence in society’ he argues that the violence is portrayed with distortions of reality, distortions which also have an effect on the viewer. He gives examples of serial-killer films which are quite frequent in cinemas, when in fact, this kind of murder represents only a minimal proportion of the violent acts in the USA<sup>5</sup> (2003: 112-

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<sup>5</sup> According to Potter, only one seventh of 1% of American murders (Potter, 2003: 113)

3). According to Potter, such distortions could lead to viewers believing that extreme violence is a much widespread phenomenon (2003: 113). In this thesis, I will also look at how this distortion of reality and violence is portrayed in some of the films in the corpus.

Regarding the myth that ‘the media are only responding to market desires’, Potter questions the extent that this statement can be considered truthful. In his opinion, violence should not be considered an essential element in the media since the main element is ‘arousal’ not violence: ‘Without arousal, viewers cannot become engaged in the action and cannot feel the pleasure of strong emotions’ (2003: 128).<sup>6</sup> He also argues that arousal is not necessarily created by violence, but rather with a series of cinematic elements such as ‘fast cuts, loud music, sudden sound effects, lots of motion within a scene, fast dialogue’ (2003: 128). Violence is linked to all these cinematic elements, and film-makers ‘who are creative can remove violence from this package without reducing the arousal’ (2003: 128). Potter is certainly right when he affirms that violence can be represented in multiple ways either in the media or the cinema. He concludes that the responsibility of showing violence in the media should rely on ‘the public, entertainment producers, policymakers, researchers and the press’ (2003: 227). It is indeed a reductionist vision to consider that this industry alone should be blamed for the continuous presence of violence in the media and cinema. The relationship between violence and audiences will also be explored later in this thesis.

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<sup>6</sup> In this context arousal refers to eliciting an emotion or reaction. It has no sexual connotations.

Another myth that he examines is the fact that ‘violence is an essential element in all fiction’, a myth which is closely related to the role of narrative in the portrayal of violence. Though it is true that some films depict a portrayal of violence linked with the genre or narrative (e.g. thrillers), Potter argues that in the media and film the major industry companies know the formula for success (2003: 139), and if violence is linked with this formula, then the media should look for alternatives.

Film critic Karl French compiles a series of articles by different writers, journalists and directors who share the same opinion on the debate over violence in cinema. French argues that films have changed over the last decades, especially from the 1960s, since violent depictions rely on more graphic violence (1996: 7). However, he points out that ‘cinema’s golden age of innocence’ (1996: 11) coincided with the two world wars.

Oliver Stone, talking about the possible harmful effects of the violence found in *Natural Born Killers*, argues that society tends to look for something to blame (Stone, 1996: 238-239), and I agree with Stone that a film by itself is an isolated element which cannot be the sole reason for possible deleterious effects on the audience.

These socially and politically charged debates have not, in fact, raged so intensely in Spanish society. This is interesting in a nation which has certainly not escaped the effects of violence in its history. Violence has been a feature of Spanish cinema for many decades in a nation in which there has been a fascination with violence visible in the works of such historical figures as

Cervantes, Calderón, Lope de Vega, Goya and Picasso, and later, with the dictatorship in the institutionalisation of violence ‘through the art of bullfighting, the neo-catholic revival and the fascist aesthetic, all of which glamorised blood and death’ (D’Lugo, 1997: 130). Spain is a country in which violence has played an important role in history dating back to the Inquisition and the Conquest of the Americas, factors which contributed to the establishment of a ‘Black Legend’<sup>7</sup> of cruelty of violence’ (Kinder, 1993: 1) some associations of which remain part of Spain’s cultural identity to this day. In her section on violence in Spanish cinema of the 1960s she points out that ‘within the Spanish context the graphic depiction of violence is primarily associated with the anti-Francoist perspective’ (Kinder, 1993: 138). She refers, here, to a period in which any portrayal of violence was repressed, forcing oppositional film-makers to portray violence in more subtle, even allegorical ways, in contrast to the healthy Spanish society which Francoist censors wanted them to show in films. Even in post-Franco, democratic Spain, elements related to the ‘Black Legend’ or the dark side of Spain still emerge as will be seen most especially in Chapter Four.

According to Kinder, ‘anyone attempting to describe the distinct characteristics of Spanish cinema usually begins with its excessive violence’ (1993: 137). However, Kinder also questions whether Spanish cinema is more violent than any other cinemas, but she admits that the ways violence is depicted and their cultural implications may vary (1993: 137). The Spanish film industry, however, has not always had this reputation for excessive violence. Florián Rey’s

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<sup>7</sup> The term ‘Black Legend’ is, in fact, based on a politically motivated myth constructed by the English as part of an imperialistic, cultural and religious power struggle (see Gibson 1966).

*La aldea maldita* (1929) portrays mild violence, and marks the beginning of an increasingly violent trend which continues to the present day. Violence, however, does feature in a number of films which form part of the surrealist movement. An example of this was Buñuel's *Un chien andalou* (1929) with its startling and brutal images. A decade later, Franco's dictatorship signalled an abrupt institutional change in the portrayal of violent images. The economic and ideological position of Franco's regime portrayed violence in a limited number of ways. It was used as a means of glamorising the deaths of Fascist heroes, exemplified in *Raza* (José Luis Sanchez de Heredia, 1941). Additionally, violence was integrated into melodramas and was directed towards stylised institutionalised conflict such as bullfighting (Allinson, 1997: 319).

A turning point in cinematic representation during the dictatorship came in 1951 with *Surcos* (José Antonio Nieves Conde). This film was one of the first to show violence in what we would now call a social realist context, in which its causes and effects are shown rather than emphasising their potential for spectacle or entertainment. *Surcos* marked the beginning of 'oppositional cinema' (Jordan and Morgan-Tamosunas, 1998: 21). For the first time, film-makers began to challenge the censors in order to express the issues which had long been denied. Films of the oppositional cinema used violence as a means of expressing political concerns and beliefs (Kinder, 1993: 138).

Other cultural influences such as Goya's work provided inspiration for this new oppositional cinema as well as being a useful model as it allowed film-makers to see that the use of violence could transmit a subtle social critique. In

*Llanto por un bandido* (1963), the most violent sequence directly quoting ‘Duelo a garrotazos’, one of the most popular of Goya’s paintings, depicts two fighters who are buried in dirt up to their knees, an iconic image ‘which has frequently been used to represent the Civil War and which Bigas Luna would later parody using ham bones in *Jamón, Jamón* (1992)’ (Kinder, 1993: 157). These images reflect a society that is destructively self-consuming. It is interesting to note the contrast between the deep psychological memory scars of a civil war and their effects on a nation with the unifying historical legacy that is represented by international conflicts. Thus, while war films symbolise a national rallying point for the British, they represent something much more divisive for Spaniards.

While socially engaged and often formally experimental film traditions continue into the 1960s and 1970s, an altogether separate, almost unique phenomenon of the 1960s onwards is the work of Jess Franco. His films made use of graphic violence, and his more than 250 films make him ‘by far the most prolific of all directors specializing in horror cinema’ according to the *British Film Institute Companion to Horror* (Newman, 1996: 121). However, Hawkins points out that this director has been neglected because of his preference for the production of popular and low quality films (2000: 88). Film critic Jim Morton points out that Jess Franco ‘makes his films quickly and seemingly with little regard to production values’ mainly directing horror films in which violence and sex are exploited (Morton, 1986: 194). Spanish horror films and the Iberian sex comedies were the most successful films in the 1960s and 1980s (Lázaro-Reboll and Willis, 2004: 12). The fact that Jess Franco’s films were aimed at a very

specific audience (by no means necessarily a Spanish audience) at that time, as well as their use of pornographic material, and that some of them were almost incomprehensible in terms of narrative, is a subject worthy of a thesis in its own right.

Ibáñez Serrador's success with the horror-suspense series in *Historias para no dormir* (1966-68) on Spanish television also responded to a demand for a 'new Spanish popular cinema' at the time. According to Lázaro-Reboll, Serrador's first feature film *La residencia* (1969) played an important role since in 'breaking stylistically and qualitatively with cinematic forms of the period' (2004: 165), it was considered one of the first representations of horror films in Spanish cinema. But at the same time this cinema represented the beginning of new popular Spanish cinema (Lázaro-Reboll, 2004: 165). Also at this time, Eloy de la Iglesia's horror films such as *La semana del asesino* (1972) or *Una gota de sangre para seguir amando* (1973) had a significant impact on audiences. According to Willis, the horror genre 'offered de la Iglesia space to explore an array of contemporary issues such as masculinity, sexuality and class' (Willis, 2003: 77). Later, de la Iglesia turned to more realistic films such as *Los placeres ocultos* (1976) or *El diputado* (1978) which combine social and political melodramas and graphic depictions of violence.

Mark Allinson points out that Spanish films from the 1970s and 1980s cover all Spanish forms of violence. There is a wide range of films which show political violence, exemplified in *Camada negra* (Manuel Gutiérrez Aragón, 1977), psychotic violence as seen in *Tras el cristal* (Agustín de Villalonga, 1985)

and also stylised incarnations such as *Matador* (Pedro Almodóvar, 1986) (Allinson, 1997: 319). A few years after the death of Franco, Pilar Miró directed the controversial *El crimen de Cuenca* (1979), which tells a story of two men condemned for a crime they did not commit, portraying judicial corruption at the beginning of the twentieth century with the use of brutal and graphic representations of physical violence which shocked audiences at the time. The violent sequences of Civil Guards torturing these two men (and the much wider and more sensitive political implications of such a portrayal) were so controversial that Miró was subjected to a military trial, in what became something of a test case for Spanish cinema and political, civic society. Consequently the film was temporarily banned, though the case against her was eventually thrown out of court (Borau, 1998: 259-60, Martín-Márquez 1999: 153), and the political exposure contributed to the film's critical and box-office success.

In the 1980s, Vicente Aranda's *El Lute, camina o revienta* (1987) or *El Lute II: mañana seré libre* (1988), are films which combine elements of 'period drama, thriller and social realism' (Jordan and Morgan-Tamosunas, 1998: 26) where the protagonist, a gypsy, is seen as a 'victim of social and political circumstances' in which violence becomes a means of opposition to the hostile attitude towards the gypsy population at that time.

Contemporary Spanish cinema has been described as 'undergoing a renaissance' in the 1990s as film-makers began to accept that elements of art and commerce are compatible with each other (Buckley, 2002: 1). This new aesthetic enables filmmaking to be commercially successful without sacrificing originality

and artistic value (Buckley, 2002: 1). Due to the fact that Spanish cinema has managed to find a middle ground between quality and commercial cinema, new directors can also acknowledge the commercial appeal of violence as features in Hollywood's movies.

In the 1990s violence continued to be present in Spanish cinema. However, new directors have progressively introduced a major change in the Spanish industry. They started to combine the formula of American genres taking into account that films must target a wider audience. This entertainment model contrasts with the quality cinema as encouraged by the Socialist policy in the 1980s with the so-called Miró legislation<sup>8</sup> (Jordan and Morgan-Tamosunas 1998: 2). In clear contrast to this quality cinema, Jordan and Morgan-Tamosunas point out that 'new blood' is emerging in the Spanish cinema with the appearances of new male and female directors, actors, scriptwriters since the 1990s (1998: 6-7).

According to Ángel Quintana:

The modern cinema, which was consolidated in Spain during the decade of the 1990s, was mainly due to an existence of a generational shift in film-makers who are now willing to adopt certain cultural parameters that did not belong to the idiosyncrasy of Spanish cinema, rather to a more global culture. In this new model, the references were not found in the empirical reality of the environment, but in the sub-cultures of the image – cartoons, video clips, genre cinema and advertising (2005: 12).

In other words, these new directors focus on using American genres whilst also creating hybrids with local and European elements. A very good example of this

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<sup>8</sup> Miró's legislation promoted quality films to put Spanish films on a par with the European cinema and intended to portray an image of Spain's valuable cultural legacy (Gubern et al. 1995: 400-3)

is Amenábar who subtly merges the entertainment bias of Hollywood with the more socially conscious European tradition.

The decade of the 1990s, therefore, represents a new emergence of genres and a new period in the Spanish cinema, and this study focuses on the different representations of violence from the mid-nineties to the present. I have decided to focus on films from the mid-nineties since the recovery of the Spanish film industry started in 1995 (Fernández Pietro, 2005, Ansola, 2003). In addition, when the *Partido Popular* came into power in 1996, they consolidated a purely market-driven policy based virtually on the opposite of the previous regime's attempts to support only those quality films it considered worthy, embodied in the so-called 'Miró laws' of the 1980s (Ansola, 2003: 73).

In this thesis, there is a clear division between what is called social cinema in which, as Quintana points out, there is a return to 'politics and a timid realism' (2005: 155) and on the other hand, other genre based films such as war films, thrillers, horror films and the 'new vulgarities' (Triana-Toribio, 2003: 151) also called 'nuevas españoladas'<sup>9</sup> (Fecé, 2005: 93). This division of topics will clearly shape the structure of this thesis establishing a progressive structure from social films in which violence is represented in a different way to the more commercially and entertainment-based films.

With regard to the first group of films that will be studied, violence will be found in social films like *El Bola* (Acheró Mañas, 2000) or *Te doy mis ojos* (Icár Bollaín, 2003). These clearly use some characteristics of the European realist

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<sup>9</sup> Stereotyped and clichéd versions of Spanish identity (Triana-Toribio, 2003: 22).

tradition in order to explore certain social topics such as domestic violence, drugs, immigration and crime (Toribio, 2003: 156-157). Two of the social topics that most worry the Spanish population nowadays and which continuously appear in the Spanish media have been chosen for the second and third chapters of the thesis: these are domestic violence and immigration.

The primary aim of the second chapter is to analyse the portrayal of domestic violence in three films. Icíar Bollaín's critically and publicly acclaimed film *Te doy mis ojos* deals with the topic, showing a balanced view of the aggressor's and the victim's points of view, and offering an insight on this topic from one of the few Spanish female directors. The other two films which will be closely analysed are *Solo mía* (Javier Balaguer, 2001) and *El Bola*. *Solo mía* was chosen because it deals directly with domestic violence and offers a different perspective from *Te doy mis ojos*, since the film has a male director, and therefore, it seems interesting to question whether this might affect the different perspectives in the film as well as the representations of violence. *El Bola* was chosen for the corpus since it has been one of the most popular films in the history of Spanish cinema to deal with the topic of domestic violence towards children. These three films will demonstrate that violence can be portrayed using multiple forms of representation that are closely related to both generic conventions, and realism as transmitted by so-called 'social cinema'. I also suggest that the audience's engagement with the film relies on the way violence is portrayed in these film texts. In addition, the different portrayals of violence are a tool of

resistance against the 'Black Legend' of the submissive roles of women and children in a patriarchal Spanish society.

The third chapter focuses on the portrayals of violence in films which deal with another social topic which is a current issue in Spanish society: violence towards immigrants. Three different films have been chosen for this purpose: *Saïd* (Llorenç Soler, 1998) is a fiction film that offers a perspective using semi-documentary techniques and mainly adopts the immigrant perspective; *Poniente* (Chus Gutiérrez, 2002) gives a fictional picture of what happened in El Ejido, Almería; and finally, *Salvajes* (Carlos Molinero, 2001) shocks the audience with a completely different cinematic style and focuses on the aggressor's point of view. I wish to argue that these films are a tool of resistance against the current conflict between Spaniards and 'the others', a conflict which is shown through different representations of violence in the cinematic text.

In the fourth chapter I will explore portrayals of violence in one of the most violent genres in cinema history: war films. This chapter continues with the close analysis of Basque director Calparsoro's *Guerreros* (2002), which follows a model closer to the recent American combat war films, and which clearly contrasts with films such as *Silencio roto* (Montxo Armendáriz, 2001) which may be considered a film about the period immediately after the Spanish civil war rather than a war film, as I will show. Finally, *Territorio Comanche* (Gerardo Herrero, 1997) offers an unusual perspective of the war correspondents in the Bosnian war. Drawing on the concept of the contemporary cultural imagination of war (Westwell, 2006), I will look at how this concept is closely linked to

representations of violence. In addition, although different portrayals of violence will be presented in these three films, it can be argued that violence is used as a tool for social denunciation of the dark side of Spain, as another example of the influence of a highly patriarchal model in the structure of society and its values, most notably as a social critique of wars in the recent memory of Spanish history, and as a tool for the recovery of historic memory in Spain.

The thriller genre is also an important focus in this thesis. Violence becomes a predominant ingredient of thrillers for reasons such as narrative, and also for stylistic and commercial purposes in a progressively globalised film market. Films like *La madre muerta* (Juanma Bajo Ulloa, 1993), *Todo por la pasta* (Enrique Urbizu, 1991), *Tesis* (Alejandro Amenábar, 1996), *Intacto* (Juan Carlos Fresnadillo, 2001), *Darkness* (Jaume Balagueró, 2002), *H6: diario de un asesino* (Martín Garrido Barón, 2005)<sup>10</sup> are representative of the resurgence of this genre. Jordan and Morgan-Tamosunas point out that the thriller can be considered a macro-genre and they identify different kinds of Spanish thrillers such as the crime thriller, the period thriller, the psychological thriller and the sexual thriller (1998: 86-105).

Due to the relevance of this macro genre, in the fifth chapter, I will analyse the portrayals of violence in what has been called the psycho-killer films, a genre little explored in Spanish cinema (Luzón Aguado, 2002: 165). The first case study

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<sup>10</sup> Other thrillers released in these years have been *Éxtasis* (Mariano Barroso, 1996), *Los lobos de Washington* (Mariano Barroso, 1999), *Susana* (Antonio Chavarrías, 1996), *Utopía* (María Ripoll, 2003), *Off* (Antonio Dyaz, 2002), *La caja 507* (Enrique Urbizu, 2002), *El alquimista impaciente* (Patricia Ferreira, 2002), *X* (Luís Marías, 2002), *Palabras encadenadas* (Laura Mañá, 2003), *Hipnos* (David Carreras, 2004), *Arderás conmigo* (Miguel Ángel Sánchez, 2002), *Jugar a matar* (Isidro Ortiz, 2003).

is Amenábar's first feature film *Tesis* which combines the classic American conventions of the thriller with local references and a European ethos. Imanol Uribe's *Plenilunio* (1999) is a film closer to classic film noir conventions with local and political references in the context of a series of children's murders. In contrast, I will look at a more realistic portrayal of violence and the psychopath in Jaime Rosales' *Las horas del día* (2003), an auterist drama which goes beyond typical thrillers. I will examine how psychopaths are portrayed in these films and how these portrayals are related to representations of violence. This chapter also aims to establish to what extent violence and realist techniques can be combined in order to create a very different portrayal from that of the American serial killer, in terms of representations of violence. Hence, I will question whether the character of the psychopath and its representation of violence in the specific context of Spanish cinema varies in comparison to the most common and recent portraits of psychopaths in American and Spanish cinemas.

Finally, I will explore constructions of violence in films which target an adolescent audience, a group of films which have been referred to as 'new vulgarities' by film scholar Nuria Triana-Toribio (2003: 151). She points out that these 'new vulgarities' cannot be ignored in the evolution of Spanish cinema, given that films like *Torrente, el brazo tonto de la ley* (Santiago Segura, 1998), *Misión en Marbella* (Santiago Segura, 2001), *Torrente 3: El protector* (Santiago Segura, 2005) or *Airbag* (Juanma Bajo Ulloa, 1997) have contributed economically to the industry and have clearly been some of the most important box office successes in the Spanish cinema.

Other adolescent-oriented genres like horror films will be also studied in this thesis. Jordan and Allinson note an increase of the ‘teen horror’ (2005: 32) with films like *School Killer* (Carlos Gil, 2001), *El arte de morir* (Álvaro Fernández Armero, 2000), *Rojo sangre* (Christian Molina, 2004), *Tuno Negro* (Pedro L. Barbero and Vicente J. Martín, 2001). Furthermore, other horror films have appeared on Spanish screens, such as *Mucha sangre* (Pepe de las Heras, 2002), *Cámara oscura* (Pau Freixas, 2003), *Frágiles* (Jaume Balagueró, 2005) and *[REC]* (Jaume Balagueró and Paco Plaza, 2007).

New violent genres have also recently emerged in Spanish cinema since Japanese cartoon style appears in films such as *Gisaku* (Baltasar Pedrosa, 2005) in which a Samurai fights to save the population in Spain using popular Spanish landscapes such as the Torres Kio in Madrid, the Giralda Tower from Seville or City of Arts and Science in Valencia. The director subtly combines Spanish local elements with Japanese features of this genre, using a mixture of Japanese and Western styles.

From all these films mentioned, in the sixth chapter, I will look at three case studies which may be considered representative of this genre. Close analysis of *Torrente*, *School killer* and *[REC]* are used to describe how the codes and conventions of this genre shape the way violence is depicted. *Torrente*, one of the most significant box office hits in the history of Spanish cinema, will show how humour, local references and spectacular action features are combined to produce a genuine portrayal of violence. *School killer*, however, is a good example of a copy of a typical American horror film. Finally, Jaume Balagueró and Paco

Plaza's box office hit *[REC]* (2007), has recently shocked the Spanish market and astonished audiences with the use of extremely explicit violent representations that remind us of *Night of the Living Dead* (George A. Romero, 1966) and *The Blair Witch Project* (Daniel Myrick and Eduardo Sánchez, 1999). The action is also conveyed through the use of a video lens making the spectator adopt a first person point of view in a story that is told as if in real time. The aim of the chapter is to demonstrate that violence is an essential element of adolescent films. It will be shown that violent representations are determined by genre features, narrative elements, stylistic features of graphic depictions of violence in its multiple forms, and last, but not least, the adolescent audience. These films do not use violence in order to critique a social problem as happens with social cinema, but adolescent films use violence as an entertainment feature which is present in the narrative and aesthetics of these texts.

This study attempts a balance between the close textual analysis of a limited number of films and an approach broad enough to afford some insight into representative categories of cinema. It focuses on some of the aforementioned topics, analysing case studies in order to exemplify different portrayals of violence. The objective is to identify an overall trajectory of representations of violence in contemporary Spanish cinema and to establish the existence of prototypes of its different portrayals. For this purpose, I will also employ a range of approaches taken from film studies, mass media studies and other sociological disciplines, as will be explained in detail in the following chapters.

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*Chapter Two*

*Domestic Violence*

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**Violence Towards Women**

Until recently the topic of violence, and specifically domestic violence, has been largely neglected by both the Hollywood and Spanish cinema academics. Lately, however, film researchers have shown an increased interest in domestic violence. Authors such as Phyllis Frus (2001: 226-244) draw our attention to distinctive myths that have represented mistreated women throughout the history of American cinema. She highlights the little consideration that has been given to this matter in the cinema of Hollywood.

In the Spanish context, where even less has been written about filmic representations of this social phenomenon, the statistics confirm the importance of this matter since almost every day cases of violence towards women are reflected in the headlines of the main Spanish newspapers (Almansa and Postigo, 2003: 315). The year 2007 ended with a high number of deaths (70) and a significant increase in formal complaints. In comparison with the previous years, the number of victims has hardly changed: 68 in 2006, 58 in 2005 and 72 in 2004<sup>11</sup>. However, recently the Spanish government approved a new law to curb domestic violence, once again reflecting the increased awareness of the importance of finding a solution to this problem, a problem that has always existed in Spain but that seems

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<sup>11</sup> According to the newspaper *El Mundo* in <http://www.elmundo.es/documentos/2004/06/sociedad/malostratos/index.html>

to have been ignored by institutions and most of the population for decades. Whilst there are only a few films which deal with domestic violence towards women in Spanish cinema, the case of domestic violence towards children has also been neglected and this is why a separate section on this topic will be dedicated to the issue in the context of Spanish families since this is statistically the most likely scenario in which violence against children is found.

Recently, a new volume entitled *Violencia de género en el cine español* (Bernárdez, García and González, 2008) has been published by several media scholars from the Complutense University of Madrid. The authors analyse a corpus of box-office hits from 1998 to 2002, films whose main theme was not domestic violence. In contrast, in this chapter, I will analyse two of the films that most directly target this social issue, and in addition, I will consider a wider concept of domestic violence including violence towards children and an approach that is closer to film studies, and not only to social, cultural or political issues. Bernárdez, García and González, however, produce a valuable study on domestic violence in Spanish cinema and emphasise the fact that more critical analysis of this topic should be carried out by film and media scholars. They also point out that domestic violence is ever present in the media with the Spanish government implementing new policies and campaigns on the one hand, and on the other, the news showing a succession of criminal acts towards women. However, they argue that despite this hyper-visibility there is a kind of ‘invisibility of violence towards women, not for its lack of presence in the media, but rather for a hyper-representation’ (2008: 33). In other words, the fact that

these acts of violence are often shown in newspapers creates desensitisation to violence against women.

While politicians and non-governmental campaigning organisations try to fight against this social problem, in Spanish cinema some recent films do deal with this topic. This chapter will firstly examine two films that deal with violence towards women, and whose box office success and positive reviews may suggest that they have caught the public mood on this issue as it is transferred onto the cinema screen: *Solo mía* (Javier Balaguer, 2001) and *Te doy mis ojos* (Icíar Bollaín, 2003).

This study will consider the following questions: How do these two films present domestic violence? Which technical features do they use and why? Are these films realistic in terms of their formal construction and/or their intentionality? In other words, do they adhere to the conventions of the realist tradition, or are they to be considered realistic more in terms of their denunciation of this social blight? And finally, to what extent are the protagonists and the violence presented to us actually representative of a social and cultural reality? The analysis will be integrated with several issues raised by the International report of 2003 on violence against women in relationships, published by the Queen Sofía Centre for the Study of Violence. This report establishes different definitions of domestic violence, before considering its possible forms of representation and the reciprocal influence of domestic violence and culture in general. Whilst academics like Prince (2003: 2-3) focus on stylistic analyses of

violence in American cinema, in this study the stylistic elements will be intertwined with social, historical, cultural and individual features.

The chapter encompasses different definitions of domestic violence, a detailed analysis of the main characters that represent both victims and aggressors as well as analysis of stylistic features using textual analysis in order to respond to the questions that I have formulated. In order to contextualise these questions, I will begin with a generic contextualisation of the films, a brief definition of domestic violence and a description of the plot of the two films in this section, before providing an analysis of the main characters, paying particular attention to victims and aggressors.

With regard to a generic contextualisation, these two films can be included in what Nuria Triana-Toribio refers to as social cinema, which is defined as a type of cinema which deals with contemporary social problems, such as domestic violence, or drug abuse (2003: 155-158). Such social cinema, as Hayward explains, is not a new current, but has existed in many cinematic trends of the twentieth century, including Italian neorealism, Free British Cinema and the British New Wave of the 1950s, as well as the *cinéma-verité* of the 1960s (Hayward, 2000: 331-332). Film scholars Hallam and Marshment define social realism as ‘a discursive term used to describe films that aim to show the effects of environmental factors on the development of characters through depictions that emphasise the relationship between location and identity’ (2000: 184), and for other film scholars such as Lowenstein, social texts investigate social topics in times of crisis (2000: 221). The fact that in Europe so many ‘realist’ trends have

existed demonstrates that it is not by chance that European cinema has made a major tradition of realist cinema; a tradition that invites us to reflect upon the problems that appear in our society by means of formal cinematic conventions. I will now look at one of the most significant social issues in Spanish society: partner violence.

While a variety of definitions of the term domestic violence has been suggested, this chapter will use that given by academic José Sanmartín, who describes it as a complex concept and observes that whilst it is one normally associated with the mistreatment of women, the term ‘domestic’ actually finds its origin in the Latin word ‘domus’, a generic term for the home and all that this may encompass. Therefore, the term ‘domestic violence’ can be understood to define not only partner violence but any violence that takes place within the domestic setting, regardless of who is the victim and who the aggressor. In other words, it may equally describe that violence perpetrated by parent on child as one projected by child on parent (Sanmartín, Molina and García, 2003: 13). The definition of ‘domestic violence’ and not just ‘partner violence’ has been chosen for this presentation because children frequently also become victims of partner violence, even if indirectly.

With regard to the types of violence or domestic mistreatment, we may find physical, psychological or emotional mistreatment as well as possible sexual violence. As has been indicated by the numerous different studies completed by the Reina Sofia centre, these forms do not normally appear separately but rather in

combination (Sanmartín et al. 2000: 8). Thus, these three types of violence have been considered for the analysis of both films.

*Te doy mis ojos* tells the story of a woman, Pilar (Laia Marull), who one night decides to flee her house and take her son Juan to the home of her sister, Ana (Candela Peña). Her husband, Antonio (Luis Tosar), goes out to search for her and the spectator becomes progressively aware of the reason for Pilar's flight from the domestic scene: Antonio beats her. Icíar Bollaín, one of the most representative woman directors of the boom in female directors that occurred in Spanish cinema during the 1990s (Pérez Millán, 2003: 55-56) directs this motion picture which has received many national and international awards. The film's box office and critical success (Torreiro, 2003: 24) indicates the growing interest to portray this social problem in Spain. *Solo mía*, on the other hand, by new director Javier Balaguer, tells a love story, of sorts, between protagonists Joaquín (Sergi López) and Ángela (Paz Vega). After the first sequence, their initial relationship appears to be healthy, but this progressively spirals as Joaquín begins to beat his wife. This film also enjoyed national success in the box office, despite receiving less positive reviews than *Te doy mis ojos*. I will contrast different forms of (re)presentation of domestic violence with the analysis of both aggressors and victims.

Also worth considering is the concept of what Ellis calls the 'narrative image', in other words, the different images which are not only shown in the film but also appear in the advertising posters and give us a preconception before watching the film (Ellis, 1982: 31). These images construct a narrative which

exploits various persuasion strategies, so that the spectator is attracted to go and see the film. The poster of *Te doy mis ojos* does not show any apparent violence. Instead, a close-up of the two protagonists' faces portrayed in warm colours suggests that the spectator is going to find a romantic story rather than a violent one. In contrast, the poster of *Solo mía* shows the female protagonist pulling her husband away as he is trying to force her to kiss him. Cold colours are used in this picture and large red letters for the word 'mine' anticipate the male protagonist's will to possess his victim.

The victims of domestic violence in these two films, as in real life in the vast majority of cases, are women. In *Te doy mis ojos*, Pilar appears as a victim of abuse, and as a stereotype of the submissive Spanish woman, silenced by a history where women were traditionally subject to the orders of their husbands. Rosa Montero (1995: 381-385) has mentioned the influence of Catholicism together with the Islamic occupation as elements that worked to consolidate the discrimination against Spanish women throughout history. In Spain this traditionally submissive role for (especially married) women, was extended beyond that of other western European nations due to the retrograde social legislation of the Franco regime. As historian Adrian Shubert argues 'the Franco regime literally turned back the clock on the legal position of women. It restored the Civil Code of 1889, which made married women legally subordinate to their husbands' (1990: 214).

The struggle against this discrimination in Anglo-Saxon countries is characterised by the important influence of feminism. In contrast to this well

established tradition, feminism in Spain appeared very late. Lidia Falcón, a playwright who founded the Spanish Feminist Party in 1979 and became one of the most representative figures of this movement, worked to reveal the situation of women and their oppression in society (Falcón, 1992: 32). The fight against violence towards women from 1975 to 1984 focused on the abolition of significant civil laws such as ‘la licencia/permiso marital’ (the so-called ‘marital permission’) in which married women were completely subordinated to their husband’s will, needing permission from their husbands to seek employment, deal with bank accounts or any legal matters (Bernárdez, García and González, 2008: 35).

It is possible that the lack of power of the feminist movements, in combination with other cultural and social elements, has been responsible for the late instigation of the search for equality and women’s rights in Spain. It is only in the period after the 1980s that physical violence towards women starts to be denounced, and that feminist groups start to provide legal help for women and safe places in which they can stay (López Accotto, 1999: 121). Perhaps the female protagonists of the two films in question here can be understood as the emblematic consequences of this delay.

However, Pilar, the protagonist of *Te doy mis ojos*, is not entirely submissive, and therefore, to some extent at least, serves to interrogate such stereotypical representations of weak female characters. During the film she rebels against her husband on two occasions; once at the beginning of the film, and again at the end. The first time that she leaves home with her son, Pilar is a

woman uncertain of her future on both the personal and the professional level. Her sister Ana and her boyfriend shelter her and help her to get work. When Ana suggests that her sister apply for a job in a church, Pilar answers: 'I have not worked for centuries', signalling that whilst strong-willed enough to leave her violent husband, practically speaking, her years with him have left her dependant on him in economic terms. In addition, this statement may also refer to the fact that historically the role of women in Spain has been diminished by the patriarchal role of men.

In a later scene, Ana compares her sister to the Virgin Mary, in a religious reference that renders Pilar a martyr, connecting her to the role of submissive mother. Thus, through the figure of the Virgin Mary, the Catholic Church effectively provides a symbolic support to patriarchy. Hence, there is a clear reference here to the aforementioned concept of symbolic violence to which Bourdieu refers in his book *Masculine Domination* where he points out that institutions such as the Church or families show certain structures of domination created by their historical development (2001: 50). Furthermore, it is not coincidental that the director has presented the characters in the city of Toledo, a conservative city that comes to represent somehow this attachment to the traditional values of patriarchy, the city becoming one more element of oppression for Pilar<sup>12</sup>.

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<sup>12</sup> The conservatism of this city is especially apparent in the aggressive masculinity of one of the emblematic films of the early Franco period, *Sin novedad en el Alcázar* (Augusto Genina, 1940) which depicts the soldiers of Nationalist Spain refusing to surrender under the siege of progressive Republican Spain.

In *Solo mía* however, the action mainly occurs in a large city, a fact that suggests that such oppression could be found in any Spanish city. Ángela is younger than Pilar, and has the further advantage of having worked before she married. It is in fact at this workplace that she meets her husband. Nevertheless, once married, she decides to stop working. When Joaquín finds out that she is pregnant he insists on his view that a woman's existence should revolve primarily, if not solely, around her maternal and domestic roles. It is at this point that small signs of rebelliousness from Ángela seem to appear and these will progressively increase throughout the film. This increasing rebelliousness is exemplified by what Ángela tells her husband:

I am fed up, fed up with the fact that you only think about yourself. 'My work, my work' do you believe that the only thing that I want in life is to have children? I want to study and to feel useful for something else apart from raising our daughter...

Despite this rebelliousness, which in the case of Pilar, culminates in her leaving the family home, both she and Ángela are still in love with their respective husbands. In *Te doy mis ojos* this is clearly demonstrated in the scene where Pilar tells her sister how her husband proposed to her. She says: 'Then we gave each other presents, I gave him my nose and my ears. He said that they were very pretty, and he gave me his hands, it sounds stupid, doesn't it?' What seems like a romantic story will become one whose power balances are reflected in the action of giving. At the moment that Pilar gives him her nose, or indeed her eyes, as in a later scene, Antonio becomes the possessor of all she is willing to give him, and

moreover all that he is willing to take, and he no doubt interprets her words literally.

Ángela's role is also that of the stereotypical wife and housewife established as the ideal within patriarchal Spanish culture. She enjoys taking care of the home she shares with her husband and, as mentioned earlier, is quite prepared to give up her economic independence upon marriage.

Despite being under the control of their aggressors, both wives return to their homes and continue to live with their respective husbands, believing, or perhaps hoping, that their situation will improve. Nevertheless, this return is not made on the same terms as their departure, for they find the strength to make certain demands of their partners, and in particular, independence at the professional level. Pilar decides to continue with the job found for her by her sister Ana almost immediately after her leaving the family home. When later offered the chance to do voluntary work as a museum guide, she accepts and much enjoys this new activity, part of a new life that does not revolve entirely around the gender role that society prescribes for her. Moreover, and aside from simply giving her an outlet for the formation of a self-identity outside of the domestic sphere, this new activity allows her to form a friendship group, whose role in the development of this identity and of a relationship with a world previously foreign to her contrasts with what Antonio wants her to do.

Hence, both directors portray protagonists who find themselves in contexts that, according to cultural critics such as Alicia Molina and Yolanda García, and philosopher José Sanmartín, can be included within so-called cultural risk factors.

One of the most crucial of these factors is the patriarchal culture that has historically served to heighten differentiation between the sexes. This in turn has resulted in women being underestimated, and consequently converted into ‘one more object of male property’ (Sanmartín, 2003: 17). Another such social risk factor is the economic dependence that the victims of domestic violence usually have with regard to their aggressor, something that is clearly demonstrated by both of the films in question here. Besides these characteristics the films also gradually come to present other social risk factors, such as lack of family support, the lack of institutional support, police and judicial ignorance, and even the very structure of these social institutions, through the films’ exploration of partner violence.

In *Te doy mis ojos* the lack of institutional support becomes clear when the only punishment received by the aggressor is that constituted by Pilar’s own decision to leave him behind. No actual legal punishment is administered by the authorities, a factor that serves to prove the inefficacy of the police system. In the scene where Pilar reports the domestic violence she has suffered, her complaint is rendered null and void by a system that does not take into account the psychological effects such mistreatment can have on an individual. It is of course, these psychological effects which are perhaps the most potent and long-lasting, a characteristic which further highlights, and indeed renders ironic the absolute inadequacy of the police institution. This inadequacy, can of course, be traced back to the origins of the Police institution; origins firmly embedded in patriarchal principles. Finally then, it comes as no surprise that the structure of the police

force is one in which can be seen reflected not just the structure of society as a whole, but also its attitudes.

Pilar goes to the police station after the climactic scene in which she has been psychologically, verbally and physically assaulted. She reports these violent acts to a policeman who mainly focuses on the legal procedure, and who does not show much sympathy. When the policeman starts questioning her about where she was hurt, the director changes from a mid-shot to a medium close-up of Pilar's face in order to emphasise her reactions to these questions. She replies: 'there are no injuries on the outside, they are on the inside'; the fact that the camera is static and focuses on Pilar's face also shows how difficult it is for her to confess what happened to her. In this place where nobody seems to understand her, public and private collide. In addition, through her facial expression, when she is about to cry, the director shows the desperation of Pilar trying to explain that it is not just about the physical act itself but rather the psychological violence which has destroyed her life, a kind of violence that is more difficult to demonstrate to the public institutions. The film makes good use of proxemics here (Giannetti, 1990: 72). It is not coincidental that a table divides the two characters. The table separates two completely different perspectives forming a barrier that indicates the difficulty each character has in understanding or making themselves understood as the policeman who represents a public institution only concentrates on physical damages. This is why Pilar says: 'he broke everything' clearly referring to the fact that he has broken her life, and the policeman responds: 'Did he break any personal belongings of yours?'. She then bursts into tears and keeps

saying: 'he broke everything'. Then, when Pilar realises that he cannot really help her, she leaves the police station.

This lack of institutional support is also portrayed in *Solo mía*, and is clearly seen in a sequence in which we see Ángela appeal once again to her attorney, confessing that she feels persecuted by her husband. She even attempts to provide evidence of her violent mistreatment at the hands of Joaquín by bringing along some recordings in which he threatens her. Her attorney responds that she cannot do anything, since a few insults will not lead to any serious legal sentence. In a later scene, when Joaquín again beats her, he is arrested but released five hours later. It is through his own words that this man then goes on to demonstrate exactly how it is that the actions of the aggressor are trivialised by the social institutions in question, (Sanmartín, Molina and García, 2003: 20) when he states that 'the trick was to beat her only moderately'. Later, when Ángela speaks to another lawyer, she learns that cases like hers appear every day, and that those in the judicial system seem to ignore these cases, a scene that criticises the current judicial system and the attitude that these judicial institutions have towards such cases.

In relation to the aggressors, Sanmartín goes on to point out that there exists what he terms a series of 'social stress factors' (2003: 20). The most important of these include the lack of economic resources, low educational level, and the fact that the judicial institutions minimise or justify the problematic nature of the aggressor's behaviour. In addition to these stress factors individual risk factors should also be considered, for instance, an inability to control personal

impulses, the justification of violence ‘just because I love you’, pathological jealousies, low self-esteem, and emotional inexpressiveness (2003: 22).

These and other characteristics are perceptible in both Antonio and Joaquín, who come to represent the kind of men whose primary means of expression is not dialogue but a kind of violence whose traces are not only physical, but also psychological. In the case of Antonio, his speeches about wanting to change never become anything more than reiterated intentions. We see that he tries to change, but he is simply not capable of achieving his aims. He even takes the trouble to visit a psychologist, a point at which the spectator is confronted with other characters, other men who also beat their wives, and who seem to echo the patriarchal ideologies that have been so deeply instilled in both Antonio’s personality and theirs.

In Joaquín we meet an aggressor in whom there no doubt prevails an instinctive authority over his wife, and we observe how the director progressively presents the spectator with both physical and psychological violence. In contrast to the character of Antonio, Joaquín is not as aware of precisely what his problem is, so that his attempts to remedy it are necessarily more futile. Consequently, the director presents a more extreme aggressor than is found in *Te doy mis ojos*, in whom this conception of the aggressive male as a victim of his society is subordinated to the victimisation of the female character. Notwithstanding these converse representations, similarities between the two aggressor-protagonists do exist, which will become apparent through a more detailed discussion of the nature of domestic violence based on information from key studies on the subject.

A study completed by the Centro Reina Sofia describes this kind of violence as one that takes on a cyclic form of three phases (Sanmartín, Molina and García, 2003: 15), all of which are clearly represented in *Solo mía* and *Te doy mis ojos*. The first phase is that of an ‘accumulation of tension’. The second consists of an explosion of violence in which this accumulated tension is released. The third and final phase is that of a ‘honeymoon’ during which some form of reconciliation is reached. The honeymoon phase becomes progressively shorter with time, and sometimes even disappears altogether, with a commitment to an increase in violent actions. This is precisely what happens in *Te doy mis ojos* and *Solo mía*, in which these three phases are repeated progressively and in which the honeymoon period eventually gives way to extreme violence whose consequences are irreversible, as will be further discussed shortly.

The period of apparent normality that precedes the beginning of this triple cycle, (and which will later be imitated in the honeymoon phase), and the moment in which the ill-treated female partner decides to react to the reality of her situation, can last up to ten years (Silió, 2003, *El Mundo*). Logically, due to the narrative restrictions even of a full-length film, this period of time cannot be explicitly demonstrated, as the director herself points out. One of the devices used to compress time is editing, and this film follows the conventions of continuity editing. The narrative is chronological, and temporal editing is related to the use of ellipsis.

Between the scenes of conflict and accumulations of tension and the sequence in which the couple are reconciled (the honeymoon stage) for example,

music is also deployed for dramatic effect. In the scene where they have sex and re-establish their relationship, for example, the music is romantic; whilst in the scenes of conflict, music is normally absent in order to depict them more realistically.

Language is an important characteristic of each of these stages of violence, and one that permits further understanding of the violent behaviour of both aggressors. The use of imperatives in particular clearly demonstrates the power that they hold over their victims. To take an example from *Te doy mis ojos*, during a scene in which Antonio, his wife and son are returning home in the car, he yells:

Does it matter what I say? Does it matter what I am saying? Shut up! Tell me what you are thinking! Shut your fucking mouth!

Joaquín behaves similarly when he tells his wife that she cannot study because she has to stay at home to take care of their children. This language of power that Antonio and Joaquín deploy becomes one of the weapons by which they silence their wives. The fact that Pilar is unable to say anything when confronted by her husband portrays the silence that critic Smelik (1998: 56) has claimed is a form of metaphorical repression, and her situation thus comes to reflect the important relationship between language, power and the structure and organisation of patriarchal society.

With regard to the use of language philosopher Elizabeth Grosz (1990) has written extensively on how Jacques Lacan's theory about language and psychoanalysis has been so influential in literary and feminist theory. Lacan brings together the concept of language by Saussure and psychoanalysis to argue

that the unconscious is structured like a language. However, what he calls ‘the real’ is outside language, as language implies symbolization and subjectivity (Lacan, 1977: 63). Drawing on Lacan’s concept of language, the feminist theorist Luce Irigaray claims that there is ‘a language that presents itself as universal and which is in fact maintained by men only’ (1977: 67). In other words, Irigaray uses Lacan’s idea to explain a tendency towards female passiveness in a linguistic world controlled by patriarchal ideologies. This passiveness is reflected by Pilar’s and Angela’s silence and their submissive behaviour in the films studied.

Language also has a crucial role in the audience’s gradual understanding of Antonio’s lack of self-confidence and of his insecurities that become progressively clearer through scenes such as those showing his meetings with the psychologist, or details like the notebook in which he has to write down positive and negative acts depending on the colour of the page. These insecurities also show that though he may represent a figure of power, at the same time he is a very vulnerable person. As has been mentioned previously, these personality traits are some of the individual risk factors commonly found amongst aggressive partners (Sanmartín, Molina, García, 2003: 22).

Whilst many of the major ideas expressed and explored in the film are, as is to be expected, transmitted to the viewer by means of the protagonists, the secondary characters of both films also have an important role to play in giving life to these concepts. The juxtaposition of primary and secondary characters allows the directors to compare and contrast different social and individual values, from which violence is absent. Thus, whilst Pilar and Antonio represent a more

patriarchal couple, in a relationship characterised by machismo, Ana and her Scottish boyfriend, John, present us with a far more modern version of heterosexual union, one characterised by equality and respect. For example, both partners work and so maintain their economic independence from each other. It is also significant that Ana's boyfriend is Scottish, his foreignness exoticising him to some extent. Interestingly, director Bollaín has also used foreign characters in her previous films including her first film *Hola ¿estás sola?* (1995) and in *Flores de otro mundo* (1999). Hence, the director uses this juxtaposition to contrast the violence of Antonio and Pilar with the calmness and respective normality of Ana and John, a normality that helps bring Pilar to understand that not all relationships are like hers.

The remaining analysis will focus on the ways in which, and the reasons why, different cinematic tools are used in the representation of violence in these two films. Beginning with *Te doy mis ojos*, it is relevant that Antonio first appears when Pilar's sister is gathering up Pilar's belongings. In this first sequence, the *mise-en-scène* plays an important role since we, the spectators, have not seen any episodes of violence take place in Pilar's flat, but we are nonetheless made to sense the presence of that violence through the positioning and nature of the props employed. Through Ana's eyes, the camera shows us photos on the floor, the remains of food both on the floor and on the wall, broken glass, and so on. When Ana enters the bedroom, she finds an emergency room medical report on which the camera focuses, permitting the spectator to confirm his or her suspicions as it describes that the patient, in this case Pilar, has a fracture in her right kneecap

caused by her husband's violent acts. Such perceptive use of *mise-en-scène* is a crucial element in the creation of films of the melodramatic genre.

Clothing is another important element of such *mise-en-scène*, and is used here to contextualise the protagonists in terms of their social class. Though Sanmartín indicates that domestic violence can happen to any woman of any socioeconomic level, it is true that victims with fewer resources are those that have more difficulties when they finally make the decision to flee from their abusive partnerships (Sanmartín, 2004: 53-54). Regarding Pilar, Bollaín shows a character who is dressed very simply, without jewellery, in a manner that indicates her lower-middle class status. Moreover, she is portrayed as not making much use of cosmetics, emphasising her humble personality, and a lack of resources that would allow her to escape the violence that she suffers at Antonio's hands.

The importance of details such as the clothing worn by the protagonists is further demonstrated as we see changes in Pilar's dress sense as she begins her new job. Although it is logical that she does not wear her everyday clothes whilst working, this stylistic change also functions symbolically, suggesting the evolution that Pilar undergoes throughout the film. New clothes are one more element of the new start and new identity that she takes on when she makes the decision to leave Antonio and to free herself from the gendered identity their relationship prescribes for her. Yet more symbolically, in the most dramatic scene of the film, Antonio violently tears at her clothes just as she is leaving for work, humiliating her and demonstrating that he cannot accept the fact that to some

extent at least, Pilar, in moving outside the domestic sphere, has freed herself from his domination. In other words, a link can be made between Antonio's desire to strip his wife of her clothes and his desire to deprive her of her dignity and individuality.

With regard to the aggressors' clothes, Antonio's do not change during the film. Moreover, he is usually primarily dressed in cold tones, which also come to represent his personality, and which contrast with the red clothes that Pilar starts to wear for work. This colour, given its connection with Pilar's new existence outside of the home, can stand for the positive newfound identity and happiness that this opportunity has given her. In striking contrast to this, in relation to the character of Antonio, red becomes associated with negativity, as his psychologist requests that he think and write about his negative acts on the red pages of his coloured notebook. It is precisely these negative acts that lead to Pilar's search for a space in which she can form her own self, a space free from his physical and psychological control. Pilar's search for this no doubt further aggravates Antonio's desire to control her, and therefore his mistreatment of her. As a result, the spectator is presented with images through which the absolute disparity between the desires of each of the two protagonists is made clear.

The climactic sequence of *Te doy mis ojos* is the most violent scene of the film, and serves to demonstrate another important element of mise-en-scène and its role in the representation of violence: namely the manipulation of lighting. When Antonio pushes her, naked, out onto the balcony, the abundance of light and the location in which the humiliation to which Pilar is subjected turns what is

usually, and necessarily, a highly private event into a far more public issue. By means of this textual representation, Bollaín performs the same move on a more literal level, drawing public attention to an issue whose continuation is permitted, in part at least, by public ignorance, but which needs to be acknowledged and remedied on a social level. In other words, she proves that this is a problem that concerns society as a whole and not just those that suffer it.

In *Solo mía*, the director uses cold tones that are typical of Joaquín's apartment and which can also be connected to aspects of his personality. As such, it can be argued that light is deployed here as a means by which to establish a contrast between the initial scene and those that follow. In this scene the spectator witnesses events from Joaquín's perspective whilst he is beaten by his wife, something that causes confusion for the viewer as it questions the identity of the victim in this case. Nevertheless, the spectator becomes aware of what is a complex narrative structure, made up of flashbacks and flash forwards, temporal switches that create within the film a series of circular motions that convey the repetitions characteristic of violent relationships. In these juxtaposed scenes, more vivid colours progressively change into cold ones, to represent the gradual disintegration of this violent relationship. The analysis of stylistic elements such as lighting serves to draw our attention to other important aesthetic elements such as cinematography. In *Te doy mis ojos*, with regard to the camera position, the director uses different angles throughout the climactic scene that we have watched. For example, in the moment that Antonio pulls Pilar to the floor, whilst tearing at her clothes, a high angle is used, adopting his line of vision and thus

representing Pilar's vulnerability to his brute strength. This effect is repeated at the moment in which Pilar urinates on herself, again mirroring the power imbalance at the heart of their struggle. All these shots and the director's use of the hand-held camera in this sequence allow the spectator to feel the tension and pain caused by violence that takes place. Moreover, the use of deep focus, a realist technique, allows the spectator to decide which element of the image we wish to focus on, in the same way as we make that decision in real life. Furthermore, at this point the camera moves backwards, echoing and emphasising Pilar's own frightened reaction.

The hand-held camera technique is used for similar means in *Solo mía*, as director Javier Balaguer points out. He deploys this technique to film the most violent sequence of the film, creating extreme verisimilitude and realism as a result as well as adding tension (Balaguer, 2003: 34). The use of hand-held camera appears more frequently in documentaries as it normally adds simplicity and tension (Kochberg, 2002: 119), and in addition, it gives 'a documentary, "realistic" or cinema verité feeling to a shot' (Rea and Irving, 2001: 162).

Another essential element in this realistic representation of violence is the use of sound. Bollaín acknowledges both the great difficulty and importance of the creation of diegetic sound and music. At the beginning of this sequence she does not use music; however, gradually the music of Alberto Iglesias is introduced played by string instruments that reflect Pilar's pain, in the same way as it increases the tension caused by Antonio. In the most violent scenes of these two films, the absence of music foregrounds the characters' words and the

presence of diegetic sounds. The shouts and sounds of exasperation and desperation of both victims create tension in the audience. On the other hand, the shouting of both aggressors emphasises their violent acts for a spectator who therefore surely cannot remain passive before what he/she sees.

As Bollaín herself points out, the recurrent use of ellipsis is another important element in this creation of an atmosphere of suspense and tension for the audience (DVD extras). This is clearly exemplified in the initial scene of *Te doy mis ojos* when we are presented with a beginning that can only be described as abrupt, and in which the reason for Pilar's obvious haste has been omitted. Consequently, Bollaín introduces a story that goes against the traditional narrative equilibrium, by disrupting the 'beginning, middle, resolution' order.

*Solo mía* works in a comparable way, in that the beginning, as mentioned earlier, is very abrupt and slightly confusing for the spectator, who sees only a pitch black screen and hears only a violent dialogue. This sequence might have several interpretations if we take into account a number of studies of the presence of violent women in cinema (McCaughey and King, 2001: 1-23). On the one hand, the reversal of power relations in this scene could be interpreted as a form of revenge on the part of Ángela, as she resorts to the use of the same violence, power and force deployed against her by Joaquín. However, this interpretation might well be criticised by those feminists who would choose not to condone this behaviour. Finally, the possibility must also be recognised that this role reversal could also be interpreted, and from an equally feminist perspective, as one

metaphorical of female anxiety in the face of a desire, or even need, to match the physical strength of men.

Nevertheless, if we study real cases, in only a few do women take the law into their own hands. Unfortunately, many of them end up dying at the hands of their partners, and very rarely do the aggressors become victims of this revenge to any serious extent. There therefore seems to be a certain lack of verisimilitude in the last scenes of *Solo mía*, when Joaquín is made to pay for his violent acts with a gunshot that leave him paralysed. In this sequence the restoration of Ángela's security is guaranteed by an ending that seems somehow too easily gratifying, in which her aggressor is left a paraplegic, totally dependant on her, or others, for survival.

In contrast the ending of *Te doy mis ojos* seems far more credible, as Pilar finally leaves her husband, and the audience is in turn left with an open ending that forces it to ponder the future that awaits her. The tone here is, at least to some extent, optimistic, as we see the victim protagonist well supported by both friends and family – a stark contrast to the loneliness of Antonio. Therefore, whilst *Solo mía* opts for a more narratively dramatic and satisfying ending, *Te doy mis ojos* has a more realistic open ending. Each ending tells us something about the respective purposes of the film-makers. Balaguer focuses more on the generic features and the entertainment, Icíar Bollaín finds a balance between the social denunciation, the cinema as an educational resource, and entertainment.

Undoubtedly the point of view predominantly presented in these two films is one that favours or supports the female victims of domestic violence, although

this is not to say that they are totally devoid of empathy with the male characters. For example, in the sequences depicting psychology sessions or in conversations with his son, Antonio's perspective is also presented, and this character is not completely dehumanised. Perhaps then the most innovative aspect of this film is that the director does not only depict Pilar as the victim, but also portrays Antonio as a victim of the society by which he is constructed. This is not to say that an attempt is made to justify his violent acts, but simply that the spectator is made aware that his inability to control his destructive impulses is a result of forces outside his essential self. The portrayal of Joaquín is somewhat different. Although he initially appears to be a victim of domestic violence, the director justifies the violence to which we see him subjected here by returning to a representation of previous events. Moreover, we do not see any signs of change on the part of Joaquín, despite the fact that even he sometimes seems to be aware of his problem.

In this section, I have shown that *Te doy mis ojos* and *Solo mía* have presented a realistic portrayal of domestic violence, using certain generic and stylistic conventions that shape the 'social cinema' to which Nuria Triana-Toribio referred. This realism seems to depart from the classic depiction of realism in terms of formal features but in terms of content, these films have in common the intention to denounce a social blight.

I shall analyse now one of the few films in world cinema that deals exclusively with the topic of violence towards children, and I will consider whether all the films analysed in this chapter share the elements of that

aforementioned social cinema in relation to representations of violence.

### *Violence Towards Children*

Whilst Icíar Bollaín claims to reject the term ‘social cinema’ in current realistic trends in cinema, Achero Mañas admits that ‘anything related to the act of communication either in a film or a newspaper is associated with a social etiquette’. As he says: ‘I like telling stories about topics that are moving’ and for him it is important that ‘we can find a cinema in which we talk about our realities, which are very diverse and have many different points of view. We need to doubt about everything and we should make people doubt everything’ (Martialay, 2003: 131). Indeed, Achero Mañas selects a very difficult reality to represent in cinema, that is to say, the world of domestic violence towards children, a topic also ignored by public institutions and families in a country where a traditional patriarchal model of the family remained largely preserved well into the twentieth century. This neglect is also due to the fact that the media do not focus on violence towards children as much as on mistreatment towards women, perhaps due to the fact that this topic is considered taboo in Spanish society (Montero, 2007). Perhaps this silence occurs because it is difficult to deal with a group in the population which does not have a voice, as they are not adults, and therefore are more vulnerable in society.

Hence, I will study the ways violence is represented in one of the most successful films in recent Spanish cinema, *El Bola*<sup>13</sup>, and how this is related to the questions posed at the beginning of this section about its realistic portrayal of violence and its use of stylistic conventions to help portray these acts of violence

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<sup>13</sup> According to official movie database from the Spanish Ministry of Culture the film was seen by 740.510 spectators and earned almost 3 million euros.

and denounce them. Triana-Toribio includes *El Bola* in the category of social cinema as it deals with social topics that are currently more visible in our societies (2003: 156). She points out that there has been a certain obsession to characterise Spanish cinema and European cinema as socially relevant in opposition to the American cinema, normally seen as a purveyor of fantasy (2003: 156). Hence, this trend of Spanish cinema denounces situations of social injustice in our societies and highlights current social problems.

I will now explore briefly the phenomenon of domestic violence towards children as a social issue, before describing the film's plot, and providing an analysis of the main characters, with particular attention to victims and aggressors and how violence is portrayed in this context. Society has for many years neglected acts of violence towards children. Professor of psychology Joel S. Milner and associate Director for the Centre for the Study of Family Violence in the USA Julie L. Crouch explain how this neglect is due to a lack of consensus in our modern societies, as there seems to be no agreement between different countries. Most countries appear to tolerate certain types of violence towards children as a punishment, but there is no universal consensus about what the clear limits for this should be (Milner and Crouch, 2004: 195).

The World Health Organisation warned in 1999 that 40 million children between 0 and 14 years old were victims of some kind of mistreatment in the world. However, this organisation expressed the impossibility of comparing 60 different countries as each one would have ambiguous definitions of mistreatment, resulting in unreliable statistics (Clark and Clark, 2001: 40). The

World Health Organisation defines the term child maltreatment as child abuse and neglect which:

includes all forms of physical and emotional ill-treatment, sexual abuse, neglect, and exploitation that results in actual or potential harm to the child's health, development or dignity. Within this broad definition, five subtypes can be distinguished – physical abuse; sexual abuse; neglect and negligent treatment; emotional abuse; and exploitation<sup>14</sup>.

However, despite this general definition of child mistreatment, as mentioned earlier, there is still no universal consensus. For example, whilst in 14 countries of the European Union any kind of mistreatment of the children is illegal, in Britain it is still possible to give children a light smack (*El País.com*, 14<sup>th</sup> December 2007). In Spain, this has recently been prohibited by law and there is still a debate whether parents should be allowed to slap their children if they consider it necessary. Until December 2007 the Spanish civil code allowed parents to 'correct children's behaviour in reasonable and moderate ways'; however, the new article in the code introduces a few significant changes: 'Guardians will have to respect their [children's] physical and psychological integrity'. Despite this, society does not seem to be aware of this change as the debate still continues and recently a child's grandfather in Córdoba was arrested for smacking his grandson. He later admitted that he was not aware this was illegal (*El País.com*, 22<sup>nd</sup> April 2008).

With regard to statistics of child mistreatment in Spain, in 2007 the Queen Sofia Centre for the Study of Violence held an International Forum on Children and Violence. At this conference, Sanmartín stated that from 2001 there has been an increase of 150% in cases of mistreatment against children in Spain. He also

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<sup>14</sup> Definition from the World Health Organization: [http://www.who.int/topics/child\\_abuse/en/](http://www.who.int/topics/child_abuse/en/)

mentioned that this is mainly due to the fact that nowadays people report more cases to the police. However, most of the cases (70% - 80%) are based on negligence, that is to say, parents or guardians do not attend to the needs of children, and the rest of the cases are related to physical and sexual abuse. Despite this increase, Sanmartín admitted in a conference on the last Congress on Psychiatry in Santiago de Compostela that only 10% per cent of cases are reported (*ADN.es*, 25<sup>th</sup> September 2007). Psychiatrist José Vidal believes that there are more victims of child mistreatment than of women's mistreatment, however, it is relevant that whilst the cases of violence towards women appear frequently in the media, those towards children hardly appear in the news as they are considered too uncomfortable socially and politically (*ADN.es*, 25<sup>th</sup> September 2007).

As a case in point, despite the fact that most of the media have presented *El Bola* as a fictional text about domestic violence, the director emphasises that this film is not about domestic violence but rather about a friendship between the two main protagonists (Mañas, 2001: 38). In other words, he seems to underplay that interpretation maybe due to the neglect of the idea of social cinema displayed by most Spanish directors, or perhaps due to the fact that social cinema is not normally associated with public success, especially in such a delicate topic as domestic violence towards children. It is certainly correct that Mañas presents a story of friendship between the two protagonists, as *El Bola* narrates how Pablo (Juan José Ballesta), a 12 year-old child whose nickname is 'El Bola' forges a friendship with his classmate Alfredo (Pablo Galán). The name of 'El Bola' comes from the fact that he always carries with him a pellet that represents a

symbolic escape from the violent atmosphere in his family. He then meets Alfredo, which gives him the opportunity to get to know a completely different family environment. It is precisely this contrast between the two families and the friendship between the two protagonists that develops through the story of this film, a film that has been recognised by various national and international awards. However, such a delicate topic of domestic violence overrides the friendship story, due to the important emotional charge of this theme in relation to violence.

*El Bola* takes a step forward in a complex and challenging subject that few directors have dared to present, and it was received very positively by critics and the public. Part of this success was achieved by the subtle portrayal of violence throughout the film, a portrayal closely related to the genre and the points of view which bring about the final cinematic result, therefore engaging the public with the emotions that the film articulates. All elements of this social blight are present in *El Bola* and they create a portrayal of a social reality that may arouse certain emotional responses in the spectator. I also suggest that the audience's engagement with the film relies on the way violence and fear is portrayed in this film text. If we consider the questions posed at the beginning of this chapter, I shall look at how Achero Mañas presents domestic violence, what technical features he uses to do so, whether this film uses conventions of the realist tradition or whether the film is realistic in terms of the intentionality and, finally, to what extent the characters are representative of this social reality.

With regard to the 'narrative image' (Ellis, 1982: 31), the poster of *El Bola* anticipates the violence that will be portrayed throughout the film, featuring a

picture of Pablo in which we can only see half of his face, portrayed in cold colours. His face is marked by bruises and injuries; especially significant is the one on his eyebrow that represents the fact that he has been beaten several times by his father in the film. The director represents the issue of domestic violence by means of the poster and therefore, despite his argument that the film is about a friendship between two children, the poster stresses the violence towards children which is emphasised by the picture shown. This half-portrait of the child's face also suggests that part of his world is entirely surrounded by violence; however, the other half of his face seems to be absent, a metaphor representing the absence of a peaceful life that has been seized by the patriarchal figure of the family. The director emphasises with this portrait that the film is about the challenge of recovering the part of his life that has been taken away by the use of violence, as represented by the family of Pablo. Mañas uses the narrative image of the film to anticipate the main elements of the story, which are a consequence of the psychological and physical violence that seem to be present in these cases in current Spanish society.

With regard to the concept of narrative and following Todorov's theory (Buckland, 2003: 36-7), the film starts with an equilibrium that progressively is broken by the presence of the conflict with his father. In addition, this equilibrium is also disturbed by Pablo's discovery of another family model which clashes with his own, thus leading to conflict throughout the film. The violence progressively increases until the climactic sequence of the film in which the spectator witnesses how the father beats his son. Although there seems to be a reestablishment of the

equilibrium at the end of the film, the story concludes in a memorable scene in which Pablo reports his father's actions at a police station, a scene that does not seem to restore normality to the spectator, but rather it makes the spectator reflect on the issue of domestic violence.

The juxtaposition of the two families in the narrative establishes the two main perspectives of the film, that of Pablo, as the victim, and that of Alfredo's family, who rescue Pablo from mistreatment. Since the story develops between the two families, the children will be the transmitters of those two different worlds. Alfredo represents a young and dynamic family that contrasts with El Bola's family, which is represented by the traditional values of Spanish society such as the patriarchal model of family as analysed later on in this chapter.

With the use of the children's perspective, the director transmits the effects of that violence through their eyes, therefore, making the audience more aware of this mistreatment, and transmitting the vulnerability in which the main protagonists are immersed by adopting their subjective point of view.

In the initial sequence of the film is the train that takes the spectator on a journey in which Pablo is the main character, a 12 year old child who is playing a dangerous game on the railtracks in an unnamed working class suburb of Madrid. The train contextualises the urban and industrial social environment, a space in which the children escape from their monotony, a flight from all the problems that they have. Film critic Stephen Holden also argues that this kind of defiant game of 'chicken' on the railtracks mirrors the continuous defiance that 'El Bola' shows with his father, Mariano (Manuel Morón). Pablo is not just a simple puppet, but

keeps testing his father throughout the film with a series of actions that represent his rebelliousness towards a situation he will not accept (2002).

In contrast to this rebelliousness, the director acknowledges how current Spanish society ignores the possible problems that children may have, problems such as their mistreatment by adults. This is very subtly shown in the sequence in which a client in Pablo's father's hardware store says: 'If we were Pablo's age, we would have no problems. [Asking Pablo] You don't have any aches and pains, do you?'. However, though Pablo does not have any obvious problems, he indeed does have a pain that is about to be discovered, a pain that is not only physiological but also one that will have psychological consequences for the protagonist in the film.

The spectator realises that the figure of the father evidences a hostility from the beginning of the film when Mariano and Pablo walk along the street; the former tries to put his hand over the child's shoulder and Pablo immediately rejects that sign of affection, as he knows it is just a way of disguising the reality of the mistreatment. Mariano's response is to say: 'Don't turn your face away'. In a later sequence, Mariano's violent reaction is shown when Pablo is talking to Sebas, one of his friends, in the doorway. Mariano shouts at Pablo and says: 'This child is an asshole! Either you go in or go out but you don't stand in the middle, for God's sake!' Pablo responds: 'But it was only a second' and his father replies: 'Don't answer me back, how many times do I need to tell you this?'. It is not a coincidence that all this dialogue is shown using an offstage voice from both characters, as the spectator can only see the space divided by the door, therefore

mitigating the physical violence that the spectator can hear but not see (Schmelzer, 2007: 86). However, this absence of physical violence is also used as a cinematic device to cause the spectator additional distress and suspense while at the same it mitigates the presence of explicit violence in the film.

This mitigation is also used in one of the following scenes in which one of Pablo's first signs of rebelliousness is shown when he comes back from spending the day with Alfredo's family. When Pablo is in the bathroom, he sees his father who tells him not to see Alfredo's family again. In a low voice Pablo says: 'son of a bitch, I wish you'd die' as he thinks his father has already left and will not have heard him say this sentence. However, in a subtle way, the director shows us through Pablo's perspective a shot of Mariano's feet, and the spectator realises that the father has indeed heard. Just after this sequence, the director uses an ellipsis that has an important narrative role in the portrayal of violence, as the spectator finds out that he has been mistreated without seeing any explicit scene of mistreatment. Here the director again uses this mitigating device so as to create suspense and anxiety (Goldstein, 1998: 217) for the spectators as they do not know what really happened despite the spectators' hypothesis.

Another good example of rebelliousness occurs when Pablo gets home late and Mariano starts to ask him why he has not attended school. Pablo confesses that he has been with Alfredo's family; after Pablo is beaten over the head by his father, Pablo cannot hold back his anger, and finally Pablo explodes, repeating his insult: 'son of a bitch, I wish you would die, you are disgusting'. This sequence portrays the most violent and explicit scene of physical violence in the film since

we see the father beating him to the floor, insulting him and shouting at him until a neighbour, whom Pablo's mother has called for help, comes to rescue him. Following this sequence, Pablo escapes from the scene and he goes to Alfredo's house, where he thinks he can find comfort and support. However, José (Alberto Jiménez), Alfredo's father, is advised by a social worker to take Pablo back to his parents' place so that they can avoid any legal issues. With this reference, Mañas also makes a comment on the ineffectiveness of the State's official protection agencies. A similar social critique is represented in the sequence where Pilar reports her abuse to the policeman in *Te doy mis ojos*. Whilst in most genre films the social worker is portrayed as a rescuer, clearly here she is portrayed as the opposite, thus conveying a clear message of social criticism.

Another victim of the father's domestic violence is the mother, a mother who represents the stereotypical role of Spanish mothers, that is to say, submission to her husband's orders. Her role in the film is based on her silence, she has no voice to express what she thinks and she does not nothing to change this. She only reacts against her husband's violent action in the climactic scene of the film in terms of violence. It is not a coincidence that, as she is voiceless her name is hardly mentioned in the film, only a few words come out when she says: 'Don't beat him'. And her husband responds: 'You shut up and don't get yourself into trouble'. Mañas shows a shot in which we can see the mother's face, a face full of horror and pain repressed by the patriarchal and violent figure head of the family.

Finally, his mother also seems to show a sign of rebellion against her husband; when Pablo runs away from the house, Aurora (Gloria Muñoz) goes to the street to look for her son and shouts at her husband: ‘You son of a bitch, I wish you would die. Leave him in peace’, words similar to the ones that Pablo has already pronounced several times. However, after this scene, the spectator does not learn anything else about this character since she does not re-appear. The spectator does not know if her words have been effective, which suggest that patriarchal dominance overcomes the aggressor’s wife’s rudimentary rebellion. Another female character who appears, Pablo’s grandmother is portrayed as a handicapped person who is voiceless as well, therefore another victim of a former generation, silence that is also a metaphor of the fact that women had little or no voice in Franco’s generation, where the only voice who could speak was the masculine one. As Stephen Holden argues:

As blunt as it is in depicting child abuse, ‘El Bola’ is a film steeped in an ambiguity that lends its conflicts a symbolic resonance. Its juxtaposition of two such radically opposing models of family could be seen as a metaphor for Spain in the Franco and post-Franco eras. In contrasting the brutal, repressive Mariano and the fun-loving, possibly bisexual José, it explores the definition of fatherhood and paternal authority. Late in the film, when Alfredo flagrantly disobeys José, who slaps him, the film seems to view that slap as more appropriate discipline (2002).

Indeed this juxtaposition of two different family environments emphasises the world of violence shown in the repressive figure of Mariano. By contrast, at the beginning of the film Alfredo is portrayed enduring the pain of the tattooing process. But this painful process symbolises the affection, intimacy and trust between father and son throughout the film. However, when José slaps Alfredo it

causes the spectator to reflect on where the limits between punishment and abuse lie. This reflects the continuous debate in different European countries and Spanish society about whether some kinds of violence may be socially and ethically permitted (*El País.com*, 22<sup>nd</sup> April 2008).

According to Achero Mañas, tattooing also reflects a pain that endures although it is not a traumatic trace like the ones that Pablo's father is causing (Mañas, 2001: 39-41). Also, the clothes that the characters wear forms a contrast between both families, for example, Alfredo's modern and informal clothes differ from the traditional clothes that Mariano wears. The old clothes represent that attachment to the old values. This contrast between the old and the new is also emphasised by other elements of the *mise-en-scène* such as the furniture in the two families' houses. In Mariano's house the spectator mainly sees old furniture, as opposed to Alfredo's home, a modern house with modern objects.

It is not only the furniture that helps to portray this contrast between the two families, also the role of doors is perceptible in the film, this object appears a few times in the film and somehow it presents the father's violence in a symbolic way: the first time that we hear Mariano shouting at Pablo, we hear him from the other side of the door, and when Alfredo looks for Pablo after he has been beaten, the dialogue takes place with a door separating them. This again emphasises the separation of two worlds, and the idea that domestic violence is normally kept behind closed doors.

Also, in these scenes the role of non diegetic sound is significant, since the director does not use sound to increase the tension with the ticking sound that he

has previously used in other scenes. Rather Mañas emphasises here the violent act with Mariano's patriarchal voice. This is especially noticeable in the climactic scene of the film when Mariano beats Pablo and all the main characters are screaming, Pablo and his mother shout for help, and Mariano shouts in order to emphasise his control over his son.

This is again an example of a world controlled by patriarchal ideologies through the use of language (Irigaray, 1977: 67). Mariano's use of language is a tool that emphasises his domination. He is only able to use command forms, which reflect his authoritarian figure and power over his son. A good example is found in the sequence in which Mariano asks Pablo where he has been and why he has not attended class: 'Have I told you to go? Sit the fuck down. Are you listening to me? Reply to me!'. Also, at the very end of the film, it is through language that the spectator becomes aware of some of the violent acts that his father has carried out when Pablo reports to the police:

He would kick me out, he would pull my hair. He used to burn my skin with cigarettes and he made me drink my piss. Before I was going to bed, he would give me a pill to make me defecate. When I was behaving badly he used to take me to a dark room and he would leave me there. He wouldn't let me go with my friends and he would make me work in the hardware shop. He would insult me, he would spit at me, he used to say I was disgusting for him, that I should have died, not my brother...

At the beginning of this chapter various questions were posed in relation to the nature of violence, how it is presented in *Te doy mis ojos*, *Solo mía* and *El Bola* and whether the treatment of violence in these films can be considered realistic only in terms of generic conventions, or whether the directors' desire to depict social reality also contributes to their classification as realist works. Finally, and

also connected to the question of realism, there is an evaluation of the protagonists and the violence presented to the spectator.

It has been shown that violence can be portrayed using multiple forms of representation that are closely related to both generic conventions, and realism as transmitted by so-called 'social cinema'. When an audience watches a film that deals with a social issue, it is aware that conflict is likely to occur, and that this conflict is often accompanied by violence. In *Te doy mis ojos*, *Solo mía*, and *El Bola* this conflict ends with violence of both psychological and physical natures, and thus these works become testimony to a social problem in need of a remedy. Nevertheless, despite this social and therefore 'realistic' subject matter, we are not spectators of realistic films in terms of an adherence to the classic realistic currents that arose in the twentieth century. The numerous symbolic elements that appear throughout both films, and the use of professional actors and numerous others of the conventions analyzed, do not conform to classical realism. As Icíar Bollaín states:

There are two major cinematic trends in the world: one is a cinema based on genre and the other is a cinema that focuses on characterisation and the representation of human relations. I reject the label of social cinema. It's ugly; I associate it with boring and depressing films. I do, however, believe that there is a lot to be said about what goes on in our society, not so much in order to denounce these issues, but in order to understand them. I am floored by people's ignorance (Martialay, 2003: 131).

Consequently, whilst these films may not be conventionally realistic in form, in terms of their content they do make a statement regarding acts of violence towards women and children. Nor can we forget that realist cinema, as a re-presentation of reality, is in fact fiction. Bollaín, Balaguer and Mañas create works of fiction that

confront social realities. It can therefore be argued, in response to my previous research question, that the realism of these films exists on both conventional and conceptual levels.

The most crucial elements in these representations of social realities are the protagonists. Through them the aggressor-victim power imbalance, and all of the consequences that this imbalance has on both individual and social levels, are made clear. The existence of these individuals as social constructions is also touched upon by means of a portrayal of the machismo and patriarchal values that inform, govern and maintain Spanish social structure and the gendered identities created within it. Moreover, the aggressor's violent acts come to be understood by the spectator as simultaneously created by, and involved in the construction of, this very social structure, thanks to details such as the informative use of language, music, the narrative juxtaposition of violent and non-violent relationships, and the manipulation of cinematic tools such as *mise-en-scène* and, of course, cinematography.

In conclusion, these three films all contribute to the portrayal of violence that some academics have considered to be one of the most prominent characteristics of recent Spanish cinema (Allinson, 1997: 315; Jordan and Morgan-Tamosunas, 1998: 191-195). It is indeed true that violence has been an important attribute of Spanish cinema since the time of Franco, when it played a role in the cinema of opposition. In the early post-Franco years its presence became much more explicit (Kinder, 1993: 137). Nowadays, as a feature of a representative art form that takes as its subject yet another social and cultural

reality, its relevance has not lessened, but has instead, as an intrinsic part of the world in which we live, increased. In the following chapter, a different social reality of this world and another relevant social issue, violence towards immigrants, will be examined.

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### *Chapter Three*

#### *Violence, Racism and Ethnicity*

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Representations of ethnicity have been widely studied by academics in film studies, with numerous works in the last decades focussing on the diversity of cultures throughout the history of US and World cinemas. A good example is the case of the different portrayals of the native Indian Americans, or more recently, Hispanic immigrants, who have a progressively increasing presence in Hollywood films (O'Connor, 1980, Richard, 1993, Richard, 1994, Gibson and Gibson, 1993).

The study of the violence with regard to ethnicity and race in the cinema has been developed in cultural studies as well as in film studies. It has taken into account diverse world cinema, but a focus has been placed on American cinema. Among the theoretical works, Giroux (1996, 2003) undertakes a comprehensive study on the representations of racism and the culture of violence in Tarantino's films. According to him, these films portray 'the popular perception that everyday black urban life and violent crime mutually define each other' (1996: 56). In these films black characters are represented as intrinsically related to delinquency in the context of American society. Giroux claims that cinema has a didactic role, and directors should take into consideration that films can have an influence on the education of youngsters. However, he also admits that film-makers cannot exclusively be blamed for the presence of violence and racism in films since violence is part of 'everyday institutional structures' that do not contribute to

building a multiethnic society (Giroux, 1996, Giroux, 2003). Other critics such as Garrido deal with the representations of one of the most ignored ethnicities in world cinemas which is nonetheless present in contemporary societies, the gypsies (2003).

In the context of mass media research, a significant number of studies have focused their attention on the representations of ethnic minorities as well as the analysis of explicit or implicit forms of racism in the mass media. Van Dijk (2003) has written a series of articles addressing what he regards as the scant attention the media in general has paid to ethnic minorities, as well as investigating the ways in which they have been portrayed. When the media does cover news related to these minorities, these groups are closely associated with contexts of violence and delinquency. All these associations, according to van Dijk, sustain a racism that is narrowly related to the power of elites over the mass media, a kind of power that can be considered as structural and inherent in the political, economic and social system. In other words, all these media representations shape explicit or implicit discourses of racism by means of certain features of journalistic and/or political language.

We should bear in mind that cinema is also part of such media discourses.

Thus, van Dijk states:

The persistent racism that appears both in television and press news, **cinema** [emphasis added], advertising, tales or books of text, is an integral part of the symbolic power exercised by the white elite (van Dijk, 1997: 128).

Martin Barker proposed the concept of ‘new racism’ (1981), sometimes called cultural racism, and argued that the UK Conservative Party in the 1970s claimed that cultural differences might jeopardise British culture. With this argument, the party justified its opposition to non-white immigration. Therefore, this notion differs from the racism based on genetic or biological differences; rather, it consists of a more complex model based on how cultural differences may cause sociological and political divisions in Western societies. Cinema and the mass media play an important role in the representation of reality as they show changes in society. While immigration into the USA and European countries, such as the United Kingdom and France, has been an important issue in society for decades, immigration to Spain is a relatively recent phenomenon, one that has intensified in the last ten years due to Spain’s increasing economic power and expanding job market. Hence, mass immigration is only beginning to become a political issue now that Spain has moved from being a mostly mono-ethnic country to a multi-ethnic nation over the last decade.

Other recent publications have dealt with the topic of immigration in Spain. For example, Eduardo Moyano in his book *La memoria escondida* (2005) (Hidden Memory) uses the concept of cinematic memory to demonstrate, through the analysis of various films, how Spain was, in the past, a country of migrants. However, he argues that nowadays Spaniards seem to have forgotten these historical circumstances, and claims that films can be used as a way of maintaining that hidden or forgotten memory (2005: 22).

Van Dijk also thoroughly examines the ways racism is portrayed in elite discourses (media, political discourse, textbooks and other public discourses) in Spain and Latin America (2005). He provides a broad definition of racism in which he considers that the concept is closely related to domination, discrimination, institution, racist beliefs ('sociocognitive' dimension) and the fact that 'we learn to be racist (or antiracist) through children's literature, movies, TV programs, textbooks, conversation with friends, news reports and opinion articles, and so on' (2005: 9). He also argues that racism in Spain stems from the dark historic side of Spain which goes back to the sixteenth century Spain 'when intolerant Catholicism, colonial conquest, and Reconquista mutually influenced and reinforced each other in the incipient Spanish and European domination and marginalization of Arabs, Jews, Gitanos (gypsies), American Indians, and sub-Saharan Africans' (2005: 13).

In relation to Spanish cinema, a number of studies have examined representations of ethnicity. Among the recent works on ethnicity, Isabel Santaolalla's book (2005) focuses on the representation of 'Otherness', using several methodological approaches such as psychoanalysis and cultural studies combined with film analysis. This volume constitutes one of the most complete studies on ethnicity in Spanish cinema published in Spanish, being the only volume of its kind to concentrate exclusively on the topic.

With regard to studies on violence and racism in Spanish cinema, academics such as Ballesteros (2006) and Martín Cabrera (2002) provide us with two different points of view on the representation of violence. Whereas Cabrera

argues that the memories of the postcolonial period are still shown through the racist violence that appears in films such as *Flores de otro mundo*, Ballesteros focuses on cultural topics such as nationalism and the existing fear of foreign cultures and otherness that is shown in mass media discourses.

Flesler (2004) explores the concept of 'new racism' in Spanish cinema. This concept is still present in European and Spanish society, and appears in the narrative of certain current films through the portrayal of intercultural romances that end in failure. She argues that although some of these films aspire to show a positive image of immigration, the daily lives of the immigrants hardly appear in the story, while directors focus more on the existing differences between the respective cultures, especially those of Morocco and Spain. Here, I will analyse how this new racism and violence are related not only to the film narrative but also to the aesthetics and style of the film texts.

Before the end of Franco's dictatorship, it was the Spaniards who had to migrate to other countries to look for a better life. This was also shown in films such as *Alba de América* (Juan de Orduña, 1951) or *Españolas en París* (Roberto Bodegas, 1970). The most common representation of ethnicities in films called the 'españoladas' portrayed a folkloric image of Spanish culture in which the only ethnicities that were normally represented (gypsies and black people) were stereotypically portrayed. In these films, the traditional, religious and conservative image of Spain prevails in the narratives. When they appear, other ethnicities, such as the gypsies, would have the exclusive role of providing an exotic and romantic element (Santaolalla, 2005: 32). A few good examples are clearly

signaled by the titles of the films such as *El negro que tenía el alma blanca* (Hugo del Carril, 1951) and *Misión blanca* (Juan de Orduña, 1946) in which the only ‘race’ that could be represented was the Spanish one.

Following the death of Franco and in the subsequent transition period, Spain joined the European Union (then the EEC) in 1986 and improved its economic situation. The Iberian Peninsula is now a land that receives immigrants fleeing from the negative economic situation of their own countries. These migratory movements are clearly reflected in the statistics which show that at the beginning of 2007 the total number of ‘legal’ immigrants was 4.482.568, which was double in comparison with three years earlier<sup>15</sup>. Thus, the question of immigration – and the related issues of ethnicity and racism – have recently come to the fore as relevant topics for social cinema.

Spanish cinema has also dealt with current social topics such as domestic violence, as studied in the previous chapter. Social cinema (Triana-Toribio, 2003: 155-158) has considerably increased the number of productions that deal with social concerns, especially immigration. Hence, a significant number of films were released in the 1990s that deal with representations of ethnicity. Among these films we find, for example: *Las cartas de Alou* (Montxo Armendáriz, 1990), *Adosados* (Mario Camus, 1996), *Bwana* (Imanol Uribe, 1996), *Taxi* (Carlos Saura,

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<sup>15</sup> 1.393.668 come from Latin America; 1.056.007 come from different countries of the European Union; 797.592 come from Africa and 216.769 from Asia. The Autonomous Communities of Catalonia, Madrid, Andalusia, Valencia and Canaries receive the largest number of legal immigrants. Taking into account their nationalities, the number of foreign citizens is mainly Moroccan (576.344), Rumanians (524.995), Ecuadorians (421.384), British (314.098), Colombian (258.726), Bolivians (198.770), Germans (163.887) Argentineans (139.711) and Bulgarians (121.611).

1996), *Susana* (Chavarrías, 1997) *Saïd* (Soler, 1998), *Flores de otro mundo* (Icía Bollaín, 1999), *Tomándote* (Gardela, 2000), *Salvajes* (Carlos Molinero, 2001), *Ilegal* (Ignacio Villar, 2002), *Poniente* (Chus Gutiérrez, 2002), *Extranjeras* (Helena Taberna, 2003), *Princesas* (Fernando León de Aranoa, 2005), *Agua con sal* (Pedro Pérez Rosado, 2005), *Pobladores* (Manuel García Serrano, 2006), *14 Kilómetros* (Gerardo Olivares, 2007). Both veteran and new directors have directed these films but, not surprisingly, these directors are white non-immigrants, and come from a middle class with a social status that seems to be removed from that of most non-European community immigrants in Spain (Castiello, 2005: 5).

Whilst the majority of studies deal with more commercial films such as *Las cartas de Alou* which is considered one of the first films in the 1990s dealing with the topic of immigration (Santaolalla, 2005: 23), or more recent films such as *Flores de otro mundo*, this chapter will deal with three films that were not especially successful at the box office, though one was well received by both public and critics. These three films directly tackle the topic of violence and immigration. They are *Saïd* (Llorenç Soler, 1998), *Salvajes* (Carlos Molinero, 2001), and *Poniente* (Chus Gutiérrez, 2002). Critics such as Alberto Elena draw our attention on the fact that ‘peripheral’ films and short films should also complement the current studies made of immigration in contemporary Spanish cinema (2005). The main aim of this chapter is therefore to contribute to filling a noticeable gap in the study of representations of violence and immigration in Spanish film academia. This study will consider and answer the following

questions: What is the link between violence and immigration in Spanish cinema? Who are the aggressors and victims in these films? Are there any films in which immigrants are portrayed as violent? In terms of kinds of violence, do films show a violence which could be related to a 'new racism', a racism which is not explicitly violent but present in society through different ideologies? Are these representations of violence to be considered realistic in terms of their social denunciation? Do we find representations of spectacular violence whose main purpose is entertainment, or is violence motivated by the respective directors' socio-political messages? Do representations of violence help to construct part of a hidden historical memory so that history does not repeat itself? Do we encounter discrimination and violence as part of racist society, or are they only related to a few isolated acts which happen in our society? What are the power relations between immigrants and other social groups?.

These questions will be answered through an analysis of the main characters who are represented by the victims and perpetrators of violence in these three films. Similarly, this study will be integrated with different film and social theories, some already mentioned earlier in this chapter.

In addition, the methodology encompasses an analysis of some stylistic features using cinematographic tools such as camerawork, mise-en-scène, music, and editing. Therefore, the methodology of analysis will follow the framework proposed by film academics Robert Stam and Louise Spence, a framework which integrates the study of ethnic representations and stereotypes with the stylistic features related to these representations (1983: 3). Film scholar Wiegman also

supports Stam and Spence's approach, and he points out that 'the racism of the text is thus an effect of its aesthetic language and formal features of production and not simply a matter of narrative or characterization' (Wiegman, 2000: 163).

However, on the other hand, I would argue that it is not only racism that we find in these texts but also implicit or explicit violence which becomes an essential element of racist discourse and of cinematographic features. Hence, violence should be analysed taking into account not only cultural, social or historical studies of ethnicity, but also following Prince's approach, in other words, the current studies on violence in film should focus in addition on stylistic representations of violence. As Prince argues, most recent studies on violence in film have focused on historical or sociological approaches rather than analysing the formal features of the different portrayals of explicit violence in film (Prince, 2004: 321-322). In relation to all these studies, other relevant studies in other fields such as sociology, history, anthropology and cultural studies explore the different representations of ethnic minorities and within this, the portrayal of both aggressors and victims of violent actions (Feixa, 1998; Sanmartín, 2004; García O'Meany, 2002; Balibar and Wallerstein, 1991). All these works will complement this multidisciplinary study.

This chapter, therefore, will examine three distinct case studies of film style. On the one hand, *Saïd* is a film in which elements of documentary genre are paramount (Nair, 2004: 104). Santaolalla (2005: 137-138) points out formal features such as the use of hand-held camera, the use of Arabic among the characters, and also the fact that actors are not professionals. With the use of these

realist techniques, Soler portrays a violence mainly motivated by the socio-political messages denouncing the already existing racist violence in our societies. *Salvajes* uses similar techniques such as the hand-held camera, but the dramatic and visual effects used by the director in order to repudiate violence combine to create an aesthetic of artificiality which completely differs from a realist tradition. Somewhere between these two different approaches we find *Poniente*, a film which, according to the director, is mainly a love story between two rootless and alienated characters (DVD extras). Hence, as Flesler points out, the director focuses on the conventions of the melodrama genre over the situation of immigration in Spain, and therefore relegates representations of violence to the background of the story (2004: 103).

Llorenç Soler's first feature film, *Saïd*, deals with the current situation of Magrebian immigrants and tells the story of a young man from Morocco, Saïd (Noufal Lhafi), who arrives at the Algarrobico beach on the south coast of Almería in a small boat. He then travels to Barcelona in order to try to start a new life in this urban environment. However, this character will realise during the narrative that what he is going to find in this city are problems and conflicts related to an implicit and explicit violence still present in Spanish society.

In the first scene of the film an initial conflict becomes evident when the police find the *patera*<sup>16</sup>. This scene represents the hundreds of times that immigrants arrive in this way on the southern coast of Spain, something seen on an almost daily basis on the news (van Dijk, 2005: 15). In this scene the police are

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<sup>16</sup> 'Patera' are small boats (dinghies or rowing-boats) used by immigrants to enter Spain by sea from the North African coast.

portrayed as the aggressors, an institutional block to the immigrants' hopes and desires for a better life, even though they are upholding the law. The intimidation which marks the immigrants' first encounter with Spain is shown through the *mise-en-scène*. For instance, the helicopter and the spotlight are used as physical instruments to threaten the immigrants, elements which seem to be more suitable in the context of war. The words that the policeman uses reinforce the atmosphere of conflict and attack when they say: 'The boat is approaching the coast, we are flying over the target'. Policemen do not refer to the immigrants as people or immigrants but rather they become the 'target', an allusion to the existing prejudices which dehumanise the immigrants even in the use of language. This exemplifies the concept of institutionalised racism with which, in this case, the police negatively portray the immigrants (van Dijk, 2005: 5).

Furthermore, the narrative image (Ellis, 1982) offered by one of the posters of the film also shows the immigrants as targets of violence in society. This is exemplified by the picture of the face of Saïd, the potential victim, at the bottom and on the left side of the poster. A circle is drawn on his forehead, and this represents the bull's eye of a weapon pointing at him. It is no coincidence that exactly the same image is used for the cover of the novel on which the film is based, and which was published after the film. Both director and novelist portray the immigrants as targets of a violent society.

Further cinematic tools intensify the verbal and psychological violence. When the spectator sees the small boat for the first time, a long shot is used to portray the anonymity of these people, which is emphasised by the difficulty of

making out any individual faces. Moreover, the scene takes place at night. Then, we see a close-up of Saïd's face which becomes a representation of all the immigrants' faces and the fear that those faces reflect. Similarly, the high angle shot taken from the helicopter is followed by low angles which take the immigrants' point of view, portraying the weakness of these people against the powerful institution of the police, and thus reflecting hierarchies of power. Here, therefore, the concept of racism as domination (van Dijk 1993: 2) is shown through the use of these cinematic devices.

Extradiegetic music also plays an important role in this first sequence and this is exemplified here by the use of a flamenco song which is played over the initial credits of the film. The significance of this particular music is to be found in its origins in marginal groups, but it is a kind of music that has been adopted as a symbol for the whole of Spain and Spanish culture throughout the world. According to Carlos Fuentes, 'flamenco is a hybrid form, and woven into it are over five hundred different musical types, from the Arab call to prayer to the latest tropical rumba'; and in addition, flamenco 'can translate its form of improvised song into something that resembles a cry – a cry, it has been said, not less than words but above them, when words are not enough' (Fuentes, 1999: 50-51). In this song, the lyrics reflect a cry for help and emphasise the powerful feelings and emotional experiences that immigrants have to deal with in this situation:

The sea is a cemetery, harsh sky...  
with no name or surnames,  
I am looking for salvation,

if my brother is dead,  
oh my God, do not die...  
Algarrobico beach where all the small boats arrive,  
every rock is a tomb, every night is a mystery.

Fast cutting, normally a tool used to increase tension, (Nelmes, 2003: 397) is another device which serves to transmit the immigrants' desperation. For example, the spectator sees how the immigrants start running desperately in a scene in which the director uses shots which focus our attention on their legs. In a way, these parts of the body symbolise all those faceless immigrants who have been victims of this situation.

In the next sequence, Saïd arrives in Barcelona expecting to find peace. Yet this peace will be broken when another element of the use of the *mise-en-scène*, that is to say, the graffiti on the walls, will shape the beginning of an oppressive atmosphere as we read: 'Moors, get out of our neighbourhood'. This demonstrates, as van Dijk argues, 'the imaginary differences between "Us" and "Them"' (2005: 7), an imaginary that has a 'sociocognitive dimension' (2005: 7). In other words, stereotypes and prejudices are adopted as general beliefs by the dominant groups, therefore representing the others as negative. In fact, the language of these messages could be seen as doubly 'othering': the graffiti is written in Catalan, a language widely spoken in the regions of Catalonia, Valencia and the Balearic Islands, but the existence of which would most probably be unknown to the immigrants. In other words, the use of a language used only in certain areas of the Peninsula adds a further dimension to the isolation in which the immigrants are immersed.

In the initial sequences, it would seem, the director not only wants to contextualise the film, but also to denounce the initial violence that immigrants suffer when they arrive in Spain, an unknown land for the ‘others’ represented by the immigrants. Furthermore, Llorenç Soler points out that in this film the spectator will find two types of violence:

The film has violence, it has violence made with blood, the violence of the skinheads, but for me the most important violence is another kind, her parents’ violence (referring to the main female character), her father’s violence who says that ‘I am not a racist but a girl like you should not be involved in this business’, and this is the kind of violence which really damages society (Video, interview in *Versión española*).

In other words, Soler points out that on the one hand, we find a physical violence perpetrated by a group of skinheads, a kind of violence that is more visible and frequently appears in the media. On the other hand, we find a more implicit social violence which is shown through the family of Anna (Saïd’s girlfriend). Her parents make use of a discourse which clearly portrays the prejudices of a Spanish society which consciously or subconsciously has created a racist discourse supported by an implicit violence from different institutions depicted in the film, for instance, the police.

Soler’s argument seems to support van Dijk’s contention that all these types of social discourse are part of a collective ideology whose discourse manifestations shape a kind of elitist racism in which the power structures are clearly controlled by a white majority. Hence, this white elite manages a subtle expression of inherent racism present in all kinds of social discourses in the media, in immigration policies, and so on (van Dijk, 2003: 53).

The racist and violent discourse shown throughout the film becomes part of a discourse represented by two groups of aggressors: the skinheads and Anna's family. The sequence in which explicit and physical violence is depicted occurs when the three main characters, Saïd, Anna and Ahmed walk along the streets of the Raval neighbourhood in Barcelona at night. Whilst the spectator sees them walking in a frontal shot, we see how at the background of the frame a group of skinheads appears which creates an atmosphere of suspense as the spectators may anticipate a conflict that the main characters will have to face. The conflict is emphasised with the skinheads throwing insults, and hence, portraying a violence which becomes present in this scene: 'Hey, fucking Moors...What the fuck are you doing here?. All Moors are queer. Look, guys, not only Moors but also deaf'.

The scene first introduces violence through racist language, but culminates in a physical attack on the two immigrants, Saïd and Ahmed. Here, the protagonists start running away from the aggressors emphasising the uncertainty and suspense about what is going to happen next. Moreover, the presence of non-diegetic music, with the characteristic sounds of flamenco, already associated with pain and desperation, intensifies the conflict and creates a tension in the audience as well. Furthermore, the use of the hand-held camera and rapid cutting will create an atmosphere of impotence and desperation in this sequence since the rapid alternation of shots emphasises this anxiety and the movement of the camera creates confusion. Finally, Saïd escapes from this violent situation and gets into a taxi.

In a later sequence, explicit violence is also found in a scene when Hussein, Saïd's cousin, is stabbed by skinheads while he is protecting Anna from them, since she has testified against them in the trial which is taking place. The change from a general shot to a close shot of the stabbing makes the spectator a witness of a violent and criminal act. In the *mise-en-scène* a large knife is used as a prop to create an explicitly violent atmosphere. The director thus intensifies the angst of the victims with these cinematic techniques. Furthermore, the act of physical violence results in the death of Hussein who is one of the main victims in this film as we will see.

With regard to Anna's parents' aggressive behaviour, implicit violence shapes most of their discourse, and it also represents the social discourse which currently exists in Spain. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, Soler points out that this kind of racist discourse can be more dangerous than any other form of racism as it is the most widespread. Balibar argues that societies are dealing with a 'new racism' which is not based on biological but on cultural differences (Balibar and Wallerstein, 1991: 21). This sort of violence is commonly found in sentences like 'I'm not racist but...' where a series of beliefs are constructed through the use of stereotypes which shape the already mentioned discrimination towards immigrants (García O'Meany, 2002: 18-19).

Anna's parents are the best example of this kind of racism in this film. Moreover, her parents belong to a higher social class which contrasts with Saïd's background and the other immigrants' social status. In fact, the failure of the relationship between Anna and Saïd is closely related to this kind of social

implicit violence as the ‘others’ (the immigrants) cannot become part of Spanish society when it is difference that shapes the relationship between these two cultures. An example of this racist discourse occurs when Anna takes Saïd home so that her father, who is a doctor, can check his health after having a fight with Hussein:

**Anna’s father:** I want you to tell me what happened in your Moroccan friend’s flat and what you were doing in that place...

**Anna’s mother:** I wish I knew, what were you doing in a place like that?

**Anna:** I was doing some work on the situation of the Moroccan immigrants.

**Mother:** And couldn’t you choose another topic?

**Father:** Look, these people are always surrounded by problems. I don’t want to see you in a mess like the one you had tonight. Luckily the police didn’t come. You know that this guy hasn’t got a residence permit, he’s an illegal immigrant. What I’ve done today I won’t do again as it is too risky.

With this type of discourse, the director shows how this everyday violence and racism is found in Spanish society, whilst simultaneously demonstrating that people do not seem to be aware of this type of cognitive discourse; so subtly is it constructed, and thus is not as perceptible as physical violence. This type therefore belongs to a non visible category that sociologist Van Soest calls ‘structural and cultural violence’ in which the violent acts are a consequence of the way society thinks (1997: 13).

I will now analyse in detail how the victims are represented and how they react and defend themselves against aggression. The main victims of this racist violence are the immigrants: Saïd, Ahmed and Hussein. Saïd and Hussein

represent opposite characters. Saïd tries to cope with all kind of social injustice as he clearly states:

**Ahmet:** This is not what you expected, is it?

**Saïd:** For them you are a delinquent, an illegal immigrant.

**Saïd:** I only want to earn my living. I don't want to harm anybody.

**Ahmet:** Calm down. The first weeks are always like that. You will feel better eventually.

**Saïd:** And if I don't...

**Ahmet:** You will have to go back home.

Through this dialogue, it is emphasised that Saïd and all immigrants become victims of a constructed social discourse in which the immigrant is closely associated with the delinquency and illegality mentioned by van Dijk (2003: 13). In addition, in this violent discourse disguised with words, we will also find a more explicit violence which restricts Ahmet's life, for he later becomes a victim after being beaten and suffers physical and psychological consequences for the rest of his life.

Throughout the film the immigrants will have to defend themselves from this discourse of power in which Spaniards represent the positive values and 'the others' represent the negative values. As Foucault points out in his theory of resistance: 'We are never trapped by power: it's always possible to modify their control, under certain conditions and following a precise practice' (1980: 13). In this film, Saïd and Hussein show resistance to the violent discourse which becomes an essential part of those social and institutional discourses. However, these two characters do this in different ways. Saïd supports the view that they

should defend themselves with the use of laws, for example, when he gives evidence in the trial despite taking the risk of being deported to his country of origin. Hussein is a character who tends towards delinquency and even the world of prostitution. He is also represented as an aggressor in a scene in which he beats Saïd after an argument with him. Similarly, at the end of the film, he becomes the instigator of racial confrontations in the neighbourhood when he adopts the position of straightforward retribution inherent in the expression ‘an eye-for-an-eye, tooth-for-a-tooth’. Therefore, he uses acts of violence that derive from the racist violence present in Spanish society. Consequently, each character represents a different type of resistance, which shapes their opposite characters.

Not only is some kind of resistance offered in the main characters of *Saïd*, but the narrative itself adopts a defensive point of view by privileging the immigrants’ perspective. In this regard, Soler points out:

*Saïd* for the first time seems to be a film in which the immigrants’ point of view is the most important one in the film...It is like a mirror in which Spanish society sees itself reflected...but it could be made in Milan...We don’t like to see ourselves the way we are...and see ourselves in that mirror like Anna’s parents...this film is like a window which looks through Spanish society.

This supports my contention of this film being a tool of resistance against the current conflict between Spaniards and ‘the others’, a conflict which is clearly shown through different representations of violence in the cinematic text. However, the script also shows an excess of victimisation and pessimism, for none of the main characters seems to be successful in their respective lives despite offering this kind of resistance. For instance, Saïd is deported and Hussein is stabbed to death. Moreover, the love story between Saïd and Anna cannot be

realised. Flesler points out that the failure portrayed through this interracial romance appears in many contemporary films which deal with immigration. These films tend to focus on the differences mainly between the Arabic and Christian cultures which coexisted for 500 years on the Spanish peninsula, rather than focusing more on elements common to both cultures (Flesler, 2004: 103). Therefore, the main goal of this film is to make a statement about the difficulties that immigrants encounter when they try to become integrated in western societies. The film text also portrays an ambiguity and contradiction when all human relationships present in the film end up in failure due to the impossibility of accepting the cultural differences.

Whilst in *Saïd* implicit and explicit violence become a tool of denunciation, *Salvajes* is less didactic in its intentions. In this section, I will analyse this film directed by Carlos Molinero, and will examine whether it too uses violence in its different forms as a tool for denouncing these social problems. Finally, I will evaluate the film's adherence to the convention of the realist and documentary traditions.

*Salvajes* tells us the story of Berta's (Marisa Paredes) family. When her sister dies she has to take care of her nephews, Guillermo (Roger Casamajor) and Raúl (Alberto Ferreiro), and her niece. Throughout the film the spectators will become aware of the secrets that her young nephews and their friends have in their daily routine, as they are members of a group of skinheads. Concurrently, a love story between Berta and a police inspector will be shown in the film while the inspector finds out about the violent acts her nephews commit. At the very end

of the film, a metafictional device is used, and the spectator realises that Berta's story is just fiction, as they are the protagonists of a film being shot within this one.

Both the title and the poster show us explicit and implicit violence. The props shown in the poster, which is a major part of the advertising and marketing strategy, also suggest physical violence as we see a large knife stuck in a watermelon. The vivid red colour of the watermelon may represent blood which has been shed in all conflicts between the culture of the existing population and the immigrants. These images, which give the spectator a preview of what he/she will find later in the film, shape the 'narrative image' (Ellis, 1982: 31) of *Salvajes*.

The first act of aggression occurs when we see a group of skinheads, among them the protagonists, painting Nazi symbols on the headstones of a local cemetery. The spectator imagines that this racist aggression targets the immigrants when this dialogue is heard:

**Teenager 1:** Bloody hell, I don't know why we are doing this.

**Teenager 2:** so that people know that these fucking black immigrants do not contaminate our dead people.

**Teenager 1:** What if they die here? Where are they going to be buried?

**Teenager 2:** In their country, they've got cemeteries; they should die there, for fuck's sake.

In this way, this sequence establishes a clear division between the aggressors and victims since the immigrants become the initial target of the main characters, which also helps to set the prevailing conflictual tone of the film. There seems to be no initial equilibrium in the narrative, as this violent sequence is immediately

presented from the beginning of the film. This presents the violence as being pre-existing in society rather than a new phenomenon. And it contributes to the problematisation of the reality/fiction dichotomy.

Another act of aggression is portrayed when the skinheads later attack an immigrant. They meet together in an unknown part of the city to wait for their victim, until a black man arrives. When the spectator hears the noise of a motorcycle approaching, we realise that the victim is about to fall into a violent trap. With the use of a medium shot the spectator can see the victim being brutally beaten. The *mise-en-scène* and the cinematography play an important role in the depiction of racist violence. In this scene, a group of youngsters beats the immigrant. By the use of a hand-held camera, a technique which is normally used in documentaries, the director achieves a degree of realism. However, some other techniques seem to work against the realism of the hand-held camera. For instance, the spectator does not hear any screams which could be part of the diegetic sound; the only sound we can hear is the gasping of the character who is being beaten. Therefore, the director uses an ellipsis of diegetic sounds, which does not create a feeling of realism but an artificial atmosphere which recurs throughout the film. Rapid cutting is also used to intensify the violence in this scene. Similarly, the use of soft focus and out-of-focus shots means that the spectator does not explicitly see how the victim is beaten. At the end of the scene, diegetic sound returns and a low angle shows the victim's perspective from the ground emphasising his defenceless situation.

This highly stylised aesthetics used not only in this sequence but also in others is very closely related to how the violence is represented. As Carlos Molinero argues in an interview with film critic Martialay:

Violence is not fiction and it is always presented to us in a stylised way to the extent that violence has its own aesthetics. I didn't want violence to be seen, however, I wanted violence to be noisy and that the beating should be subjectively presented so that the public felt as defenceless as the victim (Martialay, 2001: 122).

Therefore, he mitigates the effects of explicit violence and emphasises the psychological effects of this act on the spectator, with the use of various stylistic devices. Part of this highly stylised way of representing violence is the editing. In these violent scenes a fast editing style predominates which portrays a more explicit fragmentation of reality. It is precisely this sense of fragmentation which makes the spectator realise how relevant the act of violence is. In addition, this sense of fragmentation is also emphasised by the way stories are presented as the director remarks: 'This is a story told in a fragmented way so that the spectator knows everything at all times. The spectator will feel the same as the protagonists' (Molinero in Martialay, 2001: 122). In addition, Méndez Leite argues that the radical visual nature of this film does not hinder the dramatic integrity of the characters (1991). However, these stylistic devices are also a technique for distancing the spectator from violence and the characters, since in some of the scenes in the film these techniques may distract and divert the spectator's attention from its message (Monterde, 2001: 23).

Also, this fragmentation is closely related to the concept of the fourth wall in theatre. This wall has been defined as 'an imaginary wall separating stage from

audience' (Pavis, Shantz and Carlson, 1998: 154). According to the director, this wall becomes almost visible in *Salvajes* so that the spectator has difficulties in understanding what is happening in the film. Portraying noise and opacity was the main goal for Carlos Molinero since he wanted to destroy the way we normally hear the sounds in the cinema, and make it closer to reality (Martialay, 2001: 122). This opacity and this visible world also emphasise the violent actions of the film, as the wall is one more obstacle creating a conflict between spectator and characters.

Another cinematic device which reinforces the violent atmosphere is the *mise-en-scène* that we find in the skinheads' bedroom. For example, the use of Nazi symbols such as flags on the walls and magazines and books on Nazi ideology, a *décor* which clearly states the ideological position of the characters. Similarly, the skinheads' appearance with shaved heads and army clothes is also representative of their urban tribe (Pérez Tornero, Tropea and Costa, 1996: 145-149). All these elements reinforce this thirst for power as Pérez Tornero argues: 'in their universe of values violence is a legitimate and real expression of individuality' (1996: 179).

In *Saïd* and *Salvajes* the aggressors belong to urban tribes like the skinheads, a movement that according to Feixa emerged in London in the mid 1960s and initially came from 'Jamaican subcultures, characterised by proletarian roughness' (1998: 271). Throughout the years this style was adopted by neo-Nazi groups, and remains in favour among current racist groups. Both films, however, seem to be reductionist in the portrayal of young people, as most of them, the

aggressors especially, are represented by skinheads. In some ways, extreme characters are presented in both films in order to mitigate the most widespread violence, that is to say, the 'new racism' mentioned earlier in this chapter. In addition, this local portrayal of skin heads also represents the current atmosphere of violence taken by young right-wing extremists in Europe, therefore, this film does not only make a local reference but also deals with a global issue. This violence is also shown in an urban environment, and *Salvajes* occurs in the city of Valencia, which could stand for any city in Europe. As Johan Leman argues, the fact that young people and skinheads cause conflicts all throughout Europe is because they are in the centre of all the urban tensions in the main cities in Europe (Leman, 1994: 130).

Furthermore, Carlos Molinero refers to this kind of violence by skinheads as a consequence of that hidden and subtle racism of society, an extreme result of common prejudices in a society which sometimes suffocates young people. They are not born murderers but, just young people who suffer the injustices of a difficult environment. As he points out all of us have a 'savage' side, and this side develops to the extreme with the characters in the film (Martialay, 2001: 123). The portrayal of the skinheads seems more obvious and explicit in *Salvajes* however, as in Molinero's film the narrative perspective is mainly based on the skinheads' point of view and we hardly notice that of the immigrants. Hence, the director does not focus the spectator's attention on the victim's point of view and the consequences that violence has on them. For these reasons, *Salvajes* does not have that effect of social denunciation that Soler's film has.

I will now analyse the role of the victims in *Salvajes*. Berta, one of the main characters of the film, also becomes one of its victims. However, she is not an immigrant, but the skinhead's aunt. She changes her view on her nephews when she finds out about their secret life, based on Nazi ideology and violence. In a later scene, Berta destroys all signs of racism that her nephews have in their bedroom, which represents the moment in which she decides to acknowledge the situation and try to do something to solve it. In the course of the film the nephews will come to lose all respect for their aunt, they even humiliate, insult and beat her in the final part of the film. For instance, in a late scene in which the eldest nephew threatens her with a knife and stabs the watermelon that they are eating, her nephew displays explicit violence. The film poster, as mentioned earlier, depicts this scene.

Juxtaposed with this story is that of a police inspector who starts a relationship with Berta. He becomes an ambiguous character since he represents a social institution which should stand for justice, but also displays violence, signalling the institutionalised violence which persists in Spanish society. This concept is again related to van Dijk's contention in regard to institutionalised violence (2003: 28), which is portrayed in the attitude of this policeman towards immigrants. A good example is when he says: 'I don't care if you come to Spain to make a living on your fucking own but I just cannot stand you, the drug dealers, taking the piss out of me!'. His aggression also targets one of Berta's nephews when he beats her eldest nephew telling him that he must stop being violent,

something which seems contradictory when the policeman is clearly using violence in his attempts to instill discipline into the young protagonist.

Finally, in the last sequence of the film, the spectator realises that we have been watching the shooting of a film. This metafilmic reference undercuts the violence which has appeared throughout the film by implying that everything is presented as fictional within another fictional filmic text. This metafictional device reminds us of the Brechtian concept of distancing the audience from the action as means to defamiliarise the issue for the spectator. Film scholar Robert Stam points out that:

Although distancing effects obviously pre-existed Brecht - indeed we have encountered them in Rabelais, Shakespeare, Cervantes - it was with Brecht that they became consciously directed toward a political goal: to shock the audience into an awareness that both social life and art are human creations and therefore can be changed, that the laws of a predatory society are not divinely inscribed but subject to human intervention (Stam, 1992: 211).

Indeed, this last sequence shocks the audience as it is only at the very end of the film that the director decides to show the spectator that his story was fiction, something which contrasts with the documentary-like interviews which are inserted after this scene; the latter do not have a distancing effect, but rather embody a closer emotional approach to capture the spectator's attention. In the interviews, the immigrants explain the reasons why they left their countries using small boats or hidden in lorries. From the very beginning of the film, shots and noises of lorries have appeared throughout the film, and now at the very end of the film, the spectator also hears these noises which reflect their life journey in space and time.

This last sequence also reinforces the existence of the aforementioned fourth wall since the immigrants talk to the camera to express their opinions about the attitudes of racism and violence that Spaniards have towards immigrants, so, providing a new perspective on this fictional text which reflects a completely different reality from the one shown earlier in the film. According to the director it is not the characters who break the wall, 'it is the voice of reality and they accuse the spectators of showing no mercy' (2001: 8). The director wants the spectator to reflect on this issue since the immigrants talk about the fact that Spaniards should not forget that they were also a migrant country, and nowadays they need to support immigrants who come to their country, and inevitably they also refer to a kind of 'hidden racism'. Molinero remarks that we should be aware that we are used to watching the news which presents this issue as if it did not affect Spanish society, but according to the director, the film makes the spectator aware that it is not just fiction, but also reality (2001: 8).

It is precisely this topic, the use of historical memory and violence, which appears in the remaining film to be analysed in this chapter: *Poniente*. This film tells us the story of a schoolteacher named Lucía (Cuca Escribano) who returns to Almería after her father dies and decides to run the green-houses that he owned. There, she realises that the situation in the business, staffed by immigrant workers is not as easy as it seems. She also falls in love with Curro (José Coronado), her father's administrator, who helps her to understand the context and situation of the business. Juxtaposed with this love story, the social situation of the North African

immigrants is progressively portrayed in conflicts and the racist atmosphere of Spanish society, conflicts which inevitably will end in extremely violent episodes.

These conflicts and violent acts are initially depicted in the poster of the film. The narrative image of this text presents a photograph of the two protagonists of the love story. On the left side, and in a smaller size, an image of a violent act is presented, showing one of the final climactic violent scenes of the film. In the background the Mediterranean is presented, contextualising the place in which these events are happening: the southern region of Almería, in Andalucía.

It is no coincidence that the director chose Almería to portray these conflicts since on the 6<sup>th</sup> February 2000 there were racist riots against the North African immigrants living in El Ejido (Almería). After three people were murdered allegedly by immigrants, the inhabitants of this town took the law into their own hands and started to destroy bars, *locutorios* (phone centres), restaurants, and shops owned by immigrants. Despite these racist acts, the police failed to arrest an aggressor, an outcome which was severely criticised by different organisations of immigrants.

The initial conflict in the film does not end with violence. It occurs when Adbembi (Farid Fatmi), one of the immigrants who work in the greenhouses, confronts Miguel (the manager) when he asks for payment for the extra hours that the workers have been doing. Miguel responds that he cannot afford to pay, and Adbembi decides to tell the rest of the workers to stop working. Therefore, the character of the immigrant challenges the power relation with his boss, portraying

the initial stage of a conflict which will end up with violent riots and a confrontation between the inhabitants of the town and the immigrants at the end of the film. In addition, the director intends to reflect exploitation at work to which the immigrants are subjected in their non-qualified jobs.

One of the aggressors, who clearly represents the voice of 'new racism', is Paquito. When he sees Lucía talking to one of the African workers and shaking hands with him, he tells her: 'Don't talk to them all, the less you have to do with them the better'. In the following sequence, when Lucía asks him if there are only Moroccan workers in the place, he replies: 'We only work with Sub Saharans. Your father didn't like Moroccans, they are the worst'. Medium shots of Lucía's face when he gives these answers reflect how surprised Lucía is by them. Here the director is able to convey this sense of surprise to the spectator, and therefore raises in the spectator's mind the issue of a racism that is inherent in society. Later in the film, Lucía challenges Paquito's racist ideas when she asks him if he gets paid overtime. When he answers positively, she answers back saying: 'If nobody gets paid then you shouldn't either'. He says: 'You can't compare me with these people'. Then Lucía, smiling at him, responds ironically: 'No, of course not, there is no comparison'.

'New racism' is also shown through the *mise-en-scène* of the bars which appear in the film. There is a clear division of space between the bar in which the native inhabitants of the village go and the bar used by immigrants. In one sequence, the spectator sees how an immigrant who tries to enter the bar in which Lucía and her daughter are drinking leaves the place, since all the characters look

at him aggressively. Therefore, non-verbal language is used as an expression of the racism expressed throughout the film. The medium shots of characters looking at the immigrant emphasise this act of aggression, and this division of space represent the current issue of lack of integration of immigrants in Spanish society.

In addition, the director emphasises this tense atmosphere with the use of props such as the television in the bar. The spectator hears and sees images of war on television; Lucía's daughter says: 'Is there going to be a war?', and Lucía responds: 'there isn't going to be a war here and stop watching TV'. Here, the dialogue of each character anticipates the 'war' that later will appear in the film, and in addition, perhaps, the director wants to criticise how the media focus on negative conflicts, reflecting a pessimistic image of immigration, which is again related to the way the media portrays the 'new racism' of which Dijk wrote.

Whilst the atmosphere reflected in the bar where the inhabitants drink is hostile to immigrants, the immigrants' bar reflect a contrast. The *mise-en-scène* shows the divisions between the inhabitants of the town as the immigrants are the only customers here. However, there is one exception, since Curro seems to be in the bar and appears to be integrated into the immigrants' space. The television shows completely different images since there are only TV commercials and a tense atmosphere is replaced by a relatively normal one. Saïd says that he needs an advance since they have found a flat and they need some money for rent. However, although Curro gives him an advance, another conflict appears between Saïd and the flat's owner when he tells Saïd that it has been sold. This also alludes to the social difficulties that immigrants have in finding decent houses due to their

lack of funding as well as ethnic discrimination which creates similar places to ghettos inhabited solely by immigrants and where no policies are implemented to integrate them with the indigenous population (Fernández Gutiérrez and Olmos, 2003).

Later in the film, there is a sequence where Curro is driving with some immigrants; Adbembi says that Saïd has been lucky to find a place to live, as some people take years to find anything decent. Saïd says: 'I'm not going to live on a farm forever, though pigs might'. There is here another conflict portrayed by Adbembi and Saïd since the former is offended by his words as he also lives on a farm. Surprisingly in this sequence there are no subtitles in Spanish which also creates a language barrier between the spectator and the immigrant characters. However, there are subtitles available in English which certainly means that the sequence may be understood in a different way by Anglo-Saxon audiences. Therefore, the character of Saïd is portrayed not only as a victim but also an aggressor since he will be continually confronting and challenging not only the inhabitants of the villages but also its immigrants.

One of the originalities of the film, as Berger (2007: 185) and the director point out, is that *Poniente* is not only about the immigrants but also about migrations as it also makes references to the fact that Spaniards were migrants. This is represented by the character of Curro, whose parents emigrated to Switzerland, and Lucía, who decides to go to Almería to start a new life in the green-house business as mentioned earlier. Therefore, historical memory is another element which helps the spectator to reflect on the issue of immigration

(Moyano, 2005: 249). However, my contention is that representations of violence help to construct part of a hidden historical memory so that the spectator does not forget the conflicts that happened in the past and so that these historical events are not repeated.

This is particularly the case of the most violent and climactic sequence of the film which recreates what happened in places like El Ejido or Terrassa<sup>17</sup>, which also reflected how certain working class neighbourhoods rejected the presence of immigrants. This existing fear of ‘the others’ finished with a savage confrontation, just as happens in the film. As Chus Gutiérrez points out:

What was interesting for me was the fact that we could recognise ourselves in the film. We can see how all of us can become savages under certain circumstances. I just wanted to look at one topic that is new for us while the rest of Europe already has some experience of this issue (DVD extras).

Therefore, the issue of racism as a global issue is also represented by this sequence and emphasised by the explicit representations of violence which Santaolalla has described as ‘an orgy of violence’ (2005: 143). Whilst in *Salvajes*, the shaky hand-held camera and the out-of-focus shot was used to emphasise and mitigate an explicit act of violence, in *Poniente* the director also uses hand-held camera but the shots are more static and tend to focus on the face of the main character. A good example can be seen when Lucía discovers that Miguelito (Miguel’s son) has died in a green-house fire. We as spectators have not witnessed the process of what has happened, instead the spectator sees the result of this

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<sup>17</sup> In July 1999 a Moroccan immigrant was stabbed by a skinhead in the neighbourhood of Can N’Aglada in Terrassa (Catalonia). In the preceding days, there had been several public demonstrations against immigrants in this city.

violent act and the diegetic sound with the shouts of policemen and others emphasises the violent atmosphere of this sequence.

Just after this scene, a more explicit portrayal of violence is shown when Curro is beaten by Miguel and other residents in the village. With a medium shot of Curro's face on the floor, the camera adopts the same position as the character, again emphasising the victim's point of view and the consequences of this atrocious act. The *mise-en-scène* shows two different positions in the film; on the one hand, that of Curro who is defending the immigrants, and on the other, that of the citizens taking the law into their own hands and ready to pursue their act of vandalism. Then, Curro is pulled out into the ground, and with a high angle shot the director emphasises the power position of Miguel. However, this position is reversed when Miguel finds out about the consequences of his setting fire to the green-houses: the death of his son. With a static shot of Miguel's face as he drops the phone, the director emphasises the irrationality of an action, which has brought about personal loss for Miguel as well as the destruction of property he instigated as an act of aggression against the immigrants.

Only a few minutes of the film show how various citizens set fire to shops and burn books belonging to the immigrants. This destruction is forcefully symbolised when the spectator sees a close-up of the Koran burning, which represents the complete destruction of other cultures different to the native one. The *mise-en-scène* of this scene emphasises this act of violence, as the citizens destroy everything they find with the use of props such as sticks. However, it is interesting to note that the spectator does not witness an explicit beating of an

individual immigrant, an omission which mitigates an explicit representation of violence, although the act is emphasised by the diegetic sounds of the shouts of people and the non-diegetic sound of melodramatic music.

Finally, melodramatic music emphasises the aspect of desolation and destruction of the streets after the sun rises. A wide shot of the Mediterranean seems to suggest that this is the only place in which tranquillity can be found. The consequence of a racist act is shown with a shot of immigrants escaping to another place. Here the director with the use of slow camera motion captures the suffering and desperation of the victims who can only try to find another place to live in peace. Finally, the lyrics of the song frequently repeated in the film: 'I have no nation and luggage, I'm not from anywhere, just from the sun' emphasise how the immigrants are obliged to look for another place looking for another non-hostile environment. This nomad identity is offered as an alternative to an inflexible vision of the nation in which people coming from other cultures are seen as negative and dangerous (García Alvite, 2007: 237).

Taking all the evidence into consideration, my contention is that these three films make use of violence in their respective narrative and cinematic devices. Violence is also used as a tool to show that different forms of racism are still present in Spanish society. It is a kind of racism and violence which has been presented through the portrayal of the victims and aggressors in both films as well as through the use of the different cinematic devices.

With regard to the aggressors, it could be said that two types are found. On the one hand, those who use physical and psychological violence, these characters

being represented by a small number of young people in urban society, but especially those in *Salvajes*, in which they represent the main narrative point of view. We also find these characters in *Saïd*, but the main narrative focus there is not on the violence and racism of these groups but on a portrayal of the most common aggressors in society. These are represented by everyday people like Anna's parents. Whilst *Saïd* and *Poniente* focus on a kind of social and structural violence, *Salvajes* focuses more on physical aggression closer to what the sociologist Van Soest called 'individual violence' which is more visible and whose perpetrators are easier to identify (1997: 13).

With regard to the treatment of victims in these three films, it seems that immigrants are clearly victimised. This victimisation, however, becomes more ambiguous in *Saïd* and *Poniente*, as here we find characters presented not only as victims but also as aggressors showing a kind of violence which cannot be accepted in a democratic society. In *Salvajes*, on the other hand, the characters who represent immigrants only seem to make a statement about their situation at the end of the film.

The three films studied in this chapter seem to have one and the same goal: to deal with the social issues of immigration, and to show the presence of violence that persists in Spanish society in different forms. Nevertheless, the three films portray this violence in different ways. *Saïd* depicts a clear denunciation of these social injustices and the director integrates the realist style of the film with the story told from the immigrants' point of view. On the other hand, *Salvajes* deals with similar problems, but departs from a strictly realist modality when the

director uses metacinematic devices, such as the rupturing of the imaginary fourth wall. Moreover the immigrants' point of view is not prioritised in the narrative. In the case of *Poniente*, the immigrants' point of view is subordinated to the melodrama conventions in which the love story is the focus of the narrative (Flesler, 2004: 103); however, the style of the film is closer to the use of realistic conventions and the presence of intrinsic violence towards immigrants in society is clearly present throughout. In addition, the film portrays circumstances similar to those of *El Ejido*, so, reminding the spectator of the role of cinema and violence in recent historical memory.

*Saïd*, *Salvajes* and *Poniente* are three films which take different forms of representations of violence as they do not portray spectacular and explicit physical violence, but still show a significant dose of violence with its different forms using various cinematic tools throughout.

We should be aware that there are also films which exploit a certain kind of stereotype which reinforces this kind of 'new racism' in our societies. Among them, it will be interesting to study the representations of violence in more commercial films, and hence films which reach a wider public and films in which the immigrants stereotyping is clearly relevant. For instance, later in the thesis I will look at the first film in the *Torrente* series in which some critics point out the excessive immigrant stereotyping. In contrast to this kind of film, *Poniente*, *Salvajes* and especially *Saïd* become part of a social cinema which literally faces up to and tries to reflect on social issues in relation to the use of different forms of violence still present in our societies.

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## *Chapter Four*

### *Violence and Contemporary Cultural Imaginations of War*

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Whilst in the last two chapters of this thesis social cinema has been examined, in this chapter I will analyse the war film, one of the most violent genres in the history of cinema, and will show how different conventions shape a distinctive portrayal of violence in this type of film.

War stories have always existed and have also been inextricably linked to ideologies, usually ideologies current at the time of production. Guy Westwell in his book on American war cinema argues that ‘these [war] films are reifications of the ideological structures that arbitrate our experience and understanding of war and are hard evidence with which to build a profile of the cultural imagination of war’ (2006: 6). In other words, the cultural imagination of war is built through ideological discourses in media, art and film which construct a collective concept of war which is accepted by society (Westwell, 2006: 5). This artificially created notion relies on the complex perception of ideology that Westwell defines in his book as ‘the inherited and shared sense of the world held by a people (what Benedict Anderson (1983) terms an ‘imagined community’) within a particular time and place, and as evidenced by their attitudes, habits, feelings and assumptions’ (2006: 6). Westwell gives a recent example of this artificial and cultural construction of war when he refers to the fact that ‘the recent war in Iraq was justified through the fabrication of a whole series of fictional scenarios’ and

the film industry 'was successful in convincing the American public to support the war' (2006: 7).

The concept of the cultural imagination of war will be used in this chapter to show how violence is portrayed in contemporary Spanish cinema focusing on three Spanish films: *Guerreros* (Daniel Calparsoro, 2001), *Silencio roto* (Montxo Armendáriz, 2001) and *Territorio Comanche* (Gerardo Herrero, 1997) Together, these three films which belong to three different subgenres of war films and to two different generations of directors, can be seen as representative of the current portrayal of violence in war films in Spanish cinema.

However, the war film is not an easy category to define, in part because such films relate to and are comprised of sub-genres. For instance, Steve Neale defines war films as 'films about the waging of war in the twentieth century; scenes of combat are a requisite ingredient and such scenes are often central to the drama. The category, thus, includes films set in the First World War, the Second World War, Korea and Vietnam' (2000: 125).

Neale considers that other sub-categories such as drama war films or comedies should be excluded from this category rather than considering them as sub-genres of war films. He admits that this definition has been contested by different theorists such as Shain, who argues that war films should be defined broadly. He considers that war films 'do not have to be situated in combat zones' (Shain, 1976: 20). He then affirms that a 'broad definition seemed useful because comment about war is not restricted to combat and because contemporary wars do not belong exclusively to the military' (1976: 20). In his study he mentions that,

for example, ‘comedies about military life do not comment on war per se’ but ‘make indirect statements about war’ (1976: 20).

Neale’s definition covers his chosen corpus which focuses on wars with USA involvement, whilst I will be focusing on Spanish films, non-US examples which differ from the imperialistic representation of wars. These representations of war take a more neutral point of view showing different contexts of violence, such as the aftermath of a civil war, or a UN-sponsored conflict in contrast to the US vision which reflects an ‘imperial’ war which will normally stand for the victorious side. However, it is worth mentioning that although Hollywood cinema’s representation of war has broadly followed US imperial ambition, independent US cinema has been very critical. For example, in the post-Vietnam era, war was more often than not criticised, then in the Reagan and Bush (senior) years, militaristic values were once again dominant, up until the debacle of the Iraq war. All these different points of view also shape the way violence is represented in the films, as will be shown later in this study.

In this chapter I will look at three films which belong to different sub-genres. Firstly, the combat film, *Guerreros*, whose story takes place in the context of the Bosnian war, which was lived out on the 24-hour media in very recent times. Secondly, *Silencio roto*, a melodrama set in the post-Spanish Civil War period, showing a perspective on events which happened a generation ago but which are being opened up for an unprecedented scrutiny in contemporary Spain; and, thirdly, *Territorio Comanche*, a drama which also deals with the Bosnian war but is not itself a combat film. Therefore, I will consider a broad definition of war

film rather than the restricted definition of the combat war film that Neale proposed. This study will analyse how violence is portrayed within the context of war films, and for this purpose, I will consider the following questions: What kind of war films do we find in Spanish cinema? Do different subgenres represent violence differently? To what extent are the protagonists and the violence presented to us actually representative of a social and cultural reality? Is violence used for social and/or political denouncement or purely for entertainment? What kinds of audience watch these genres? Do they demand or expect violence, and specifically more graphic and explicit violence? Do the narratives follow American models of spectacular narratives? What are the stylistic features of these representations?.

In his article on violence and World War II, Slocum points out that few studies have examined violence drawing on the sociological work by Norbert Elias on the concept of ‘civilizing process’ (2005: 35). Elias’ complex concept examines how Western civilisations are shaped by social behaviours and, for example, how violence and manners change throughout the centuries (1978). The ‘civilizing process’ is a never-ending one, and is developed and based on socio-cultural and political contexts (Van Krieken, 1998: 106). Slocum, starting from Elias’s concept, undertakes a different approach to studying violence in the World War II film. He criticises other academic analyses which focus on the debate about whether violence is authentic or realistic, and whether this violence has any adverse effects on the viewers. His approach ‘integrates concerns ranging from specific images, styles, and narratives to the institutional role of cinema in

society' (2005: 58), and in addition, he argues that violence 'becomes a historically specific and culturally contingent indicator of changes in individual standards of behaviour, spectatorial dynamics, state and institutional development, and the regulation of social relations in cinema and the society at large' (2005: 58). In his more recent book on Hollywood war films he extends this argument, and asserts that there has been an ongoing debate about the realism or authenticity of the violent battles portrayed in war films, standards which - according to Slocum - change over the time. This implies that the portrayals of violence also vary depending on the time of production, which means that in the study of violence, one should analyse not only stylistic features, but also the contextual role of cinema and its time of production as well as different contexts of reception and audiences.

Hence, in this chapter, I will not only look at specific stylistic features but also at the production contexts and how these three Spanish films use violence for different purposes taking into consideration the different reception contexts of both films. Furthermore, this chapter proposes a different approach to the study of violence in Spanish war films based on Westwell and Slocum's arguments. Drawing on the concept of the contemporary cultural imagination of war, Westwell argues that the main elements of this concept are the following: 'point of view, identity, morality and memory' (2006: 109).

First, he suggests that points of view vary depending on the war film. Film scholar Pierre Sorlin argues that war films are shown 'as the sum of heroic actions carried out by a handful of individuals' (Sorlin, 1994: 359). In addition, he admits

that these individual perspectives shown in films represent certain ‘stereotypes’ which ‘restrict the memory of war to a few recurring themes’ (1994: 361). Westwell argues that ‘the war cinema’s focus on individual experience is profoundly reductive, acting as a premise for partial sightedness and lack of historical framing’ (2006: 109). He mentions some examples to show how different points of view can shape this cultural imagination of war. *The Thin Red Line* (Terrence Malick, 1998), for instance, offers different perspectives of various individual characters and creates a multifaceted sense of war (2006: 109). Also *Saving Private Ryan* (Steven Spielberg, 1998) and *Pearl Harbor* (Michael Bay, 2001) show how memory plays an important role for those who fought in World War II. In these films individual experiences become the means to show how these wars become global events in history.

Westwell also mentions the two films that Clint Eastwood has recently directed, *Flags of our Fathers* (Clint Eastwood, 2006) focuses on the American perspective in the conflict on Iwo Jima. The other film, entitled *Letters from Iwo Jima* (Clint Eastwood, 2006), takes a completely opposite point of view, the one of the Japanese soldiers; and thus opposing points of view demonstrate how dissimilar perspectives will show two different portrayals of a different cultural imagination of war.

Eastwood’s double perspective could be compared with alternative perspectives offered by Spanish cinema, at different times, on the history of Spain. For instance, the representation of the Spanish Civil War during the four decades of Franco’s dictatorship according to a Nationalist version of history, was

then followed by the counter argument of the 'lost' version from the perspective of the Second Republic, a version which could only be affirmed after 1975. And *Silencio Roto* is part of that historical change on permissible political perspectives.

According to Westwell, the second main element of the cultural imagination of war is identity. He argues that 'this is seen most clearly in the war film's dependence on a prejudicial construction of cultural otherness, in which an American identity is forged in relation to the threat of an enemy who is alien and dangerous' (2006: 110). He gives the example of Japanese soldiers who were portrayed by means of racial stereotypes in World War combat films. In addition, Westwell points out that 'war cinema presents America as the world's 'indispensable nation' unparalleled in its commitment to freedom and democracy' (2006: 111). This imperialist position contrasts with the position of Spanish war films which portray a different identity, one that perhaps does not subscribe to the 'them and us' hero-alien politics of the world superpower represented by the USA. This chapter will present perspectives which are, given their contexts, outside this imperialist position.

Morality is the third key component of the cultural imagination of war. This concept is linked to the 'moral viewpoint' which means that 'the moral universe constructed by almost all war films, or campaign, or wider war is posed as a struggle between elemental forces of good and evil' (Westwell, 2006: 113). In most American films there is a polarisation of the characters (good versus evil) in which normally only Americans are represented as the world's saviours. This study will show how in Spanish cinema, this polarisation will not be as evident as

in American films, and, therefore the violent conflicts between the sides involved will be also portrayed in a different way.

Memory is the last component of this concept of cultural imagination of war. In Westwell's own words 'the formation of cultural memory and the war film genre is one of the primary ways in which past wars are recalled, re-enacted and rescripted' (2006: 113). War films shape a historical memory which varies depending on the time of production. For example, the propaganda image of World War II films contrast with those which question the unsuccessful policies on the Gulf War under the presidency of Bush (2006: 114). In the context of Spanish cinema, during Franco's dictatorship, films portrayed an ideology based on the totalitarian regime and its cultural values under censorship. However, after the demise of Franco's regime, historical revisionism was undertaken with a completely different approach since censorship was no longer there to impose limits. In this chapter, one of the films revises the memory of the post Spanish civil war period whilst the other two look at a more recent European war, the Yugoslav war.

Slocum also mentions that history and memory become two pivotal elements in war films, as the 'greater role of movies in influencing understandings of historical events raises profound questions about the roles both of technological media and of more-traditional, especially archive and written text-based modes of approaching the past' (2006: 14). Films, therefore, also help to construct a historical memory. In addition, memory helps to avoid the repetition of human atrocities in history, and as Susan Sontag, in her book on the effects images of

human suffering have on us, points out, ‘Remembering is an ethical act, has ethical value in and of itself. Memory is, aching, the only relation we can have with the dead’ (Sontag, 2003: 115). Therefore, the portrayal of violence is closely related to the concept of memory, a memory marked by violent acts in world history. However, while Susan Sontag admits that images help to construct a historical memory, she also argues that the reactions of the people who watch these images vary from sympathy to indifference as we sometimes are overexposed by the numerous images of atrocities in wars on TV and in the media (2003: 83).

An assumption of American national identity is made in the majority of approaches detailed so far in this chapter. But what of war films made in the industrial and socio-cultural context of Spanish cinema in the contemporary period? Guillermo Altares, in his book on war films, suggests that the first film in Spanish cinema which dealt with war was shot in Barcelona on the 19<sup>th</sup> July 1936 by the Oficina de Información y Propaganda de la CNT-FAI and focused on the perspective of the Republican side (1999: 308). The Republican side also used a large number of propagandistic visual materials such as posters. According to artist Josep Renau the use of posters was a ‘scream stuck on the wall’, a scream against the other side, and the posters were mainly inspired by the post-revolutionary Soviet propaganda posters in which the technique of photo montage was widely used. Renau himself designed posters for Spanish film production company CIFESA portraying a narrative image closer to the Republican ideology (Renau, 1980: 36).

On the fascist side, when the Departamento Nacional de Cinematografía (National Department of Cinematography) was founded in 1938 in Madrid, it started to produce films which represented the ideology of the Nationalist side. After the Spanish Civil War the so-called 'cine de cruzada' (cinema of crusade) started with films such as *Escuadrilla* (Antonio Román 1941), *A mí, la legion* (Juan de Orduña, 1942), *Alhucemas* (José López Rubio, 1948) and the most popular film of this cinema, *Raza* (José Luis Sánchez de Heredia, 1942) whose script was written by the dictator Franco under the pseudonym of Jaime de Andrade (Altares, 1999: 309). This film was re-released in 1950 under the title of *Espíritu de una raza*. The film is an excellent example of what the Spanish 'race' represented for Franco. He used a grossly oversimplified understanding of race equated with national identity, an identity that he felt he had saved from the threat of Soviet communism. Censorship was the weapon that was used to prohibit or change any film which did not belong to the Franco regime's ideology. However, some films which were closer to the Republican ideology were released with substantial changes, for instance, *Tierra de todos* (Antonio Isasi Isasmendi, 1962) or *Golpe de mano* (José Antonio de Loma, 1970), films which began to contest the one-sided view of recent Spanish history which lasted for almost 40 years.

With the death of Franco, films such as *Las largas vacaciones del 36* (Jaime Camino, 1976) portrayed different points of view, in this case, that of the bourgeoisie living near Barcelona. Fiction films and documentaries were also part of this change in the Spanish cinema including *La vieja memoria* (Jaime Camino, 1977), *Las bicicletas son para el verano* (Jaime Chavarri, 1983), *El balcón*

*abierto* (Jaime Camino, 1984) and *Dragon Rapide* (Jaime Camino, 1986). During the transition period up to the 1990s a few films dealt with the Spanish civil war as the first socialist government advocated the recovery of historical memory (Fernández Prieto, 2005: 175). According to film historian Caparrós Lera<sup>18</sup>, films after the death of Franco which dealt with the Spanish civil war focused on the perspective of the ‘losers’, and the number of films made was smaller. During the transition 15 films about the Spanish civil war were produced, 17 in the socialist period (1982-1996), and 11 films during the Partido Popular (Popular Party) government (1996-2004). In the current period of socialist government, new films about the Spanish civil war have been produced in a time in which the socialists have supported the Historical Memory Law against the opinion of the opposition party<sup>19</sup>. According to writer Antonio Muñoz Molina in Spain

until very recently, it was not possible to write – or even speak, almost – about the Civil War or the post-war years from the viewpoint of the losing side. First there was the Francoist repression, and then the ‘pact of silence’ during the transition, which suppressed the memories of defeat in the name of a questionable democratic coexistence. Then, a few years ago, several books and films began to break the silence, thanks mostly to José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero’s government. ‘Finally, we can speak without fear,’ said a radio listener shortly after José Luis Cuerda’s film *The Blind Sunflowers* was released this summer (2008: 8).

Beginning in the 1990s there was a renewed interest, including in the world of cinema, in bringing justice to the victims of Spain’s traumatic twentieth century. Films such as *¡Ay, Carmela!* (Carlos Saura, 1990) start a new period in Spanish

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<sup>18</sup> In his personal blog online: <http://caparroscinema.blogspot.com/> in the section entitled ‘La Guerra Civil española en el cine’.

<sup>19</sup> This law was passed by the Spanish parliament on 31<sup>st</sup> October 2007. The main purpose of this law is to remember the victims on both sides of the Spanish Civil War. The Popular Party, the oppositional party, has strongly opposed this law as they claim it will open new wounds.

cinema in which historical memory starts to be recovered. *Libertarias* (Vicente Aranda, 1996), *La hora de los valientes* (Antonio Mercero, 1998), *La niña de tus ojos* (Fernando Trueba, 1998), *Soldados de Salamina* (David Trueba, 2003), *Las 13 rosas* (Emilio Martínez Lázaro, 2007) and *Los girasoles ciegos* (José Luis Cuerda, 2008) are other examples of this cinema which represented the Spanish civil war from different perspectives. In addition, the British director Ken Loach made *Land and Freedom* which gave a different portrayal of the Spanish civil war and it has been considered by some critics the best portrayal of the Spanish civil war (Rodríguez, 2006: 48, Crusells, 2000: 257).

As mentioned above, films about the Spanish civil war have usually shown violence from one of two perspectives: that of the Nationalist side, which was supported by right-wing interests whose vital objective was to defend the nation; and that of the Republican side's fight against fascism. Normally, propagandistic purposes have been prevalent in war films in favour of either one or other of the sides involved in this conflict.

However, recent films about war have focused on the horror of war and all the inevitable consequences that they bring to any society. More recently, films are also focused on presenting characters who are not portrayed as polarised, that is to say, characters on either side of the conflict will be presented as in between the polarised positions that we used to find in war films during most of the twentieth century (good vs evil). Therefore, in terms of characterisation the protagonists are introduced with more ambiguous features where there are neither losers nor winners, as will be shown in the analysis of both films studied in this

chapter. This ambiguity also relates these films to a European tradition of film-making, as opposed to the more polarised positions and versions of the mainstream American films (Jordan and Allinson, 2005: 65). In other words, whilst classical American films normally show linear narratives which lead to closed endings or feature characters who single-handedly drive the narrative, European directors sometimes distance themselves from this, and create films with open endings and characters who are less stereotypically portrayed (Everett, 2005: 17).

Sporadic attention has been paid to the study of violence and war films in Spanish cinema. Most studies of Spanish war cinema have focused on the analysis of films during the Franco period and the portrayal of the most important conflict in Spain in the twentieth century: the Spanish civil war. For the present study, three films have been chosen. *Guerreros* is a combat film which tells the story of a group of Spanish soldiers who embark on the adventure of defending people in a recent European war, the Bosnian war, a conflict which was physically and emotionally distant from most Spaniards. In contrast, *Silencio roto* is a melodrama more representative of the cinema which portrays the post-Spanish civil war period without recourse to combat scenes or other features of the war film per se. This melodramatic conception of war is by far the most common platform for such conflicts in Spanish cinema, perhaps in an attempt to focus on portraying human emotions and thus attracting a wider audience. However, this link between melodrama and the war film has also featured in Hollywood films such as Vietnam War films, where elements of melodrama sometimes overlap with

elements of war films (Lipkin, 1990: 183). Finally, I will look at *Territorio Comanche*, is a war drama which offers a completely different perspective, that of war correspondents, a topic barely explored in either American or European war films.

These films belong to different generations of directors: Calparsoro represents the young directors who have largely ignored recent Spanish history, whilst Montxo Armendáriz is one of the directors with a social commitment and who is representative of those older-generation directors keen on recovering historical memory. Gerardo Herrero also belongs to an older generation, but seems to be interested in more recent topics in history and society. I will look at how violence is a predominant element in these three films whose representations of violence and the contemporary cultural imagination of war differ completely from each other.

In the Spanish cinema of the 1990s there was a re-emergence of genre cinema, predominantly in the work of younger directors. This type of film contrasts with the concept of quality cinema that Pilar Miró promoted in the 1980s. However, Calparsoro's film *Guerreros* is unprecedented in the history of recent Spanish cinema. It is a Spanish film about Spanish soldiers caught up in a contemporary European war zone at the time of shooting the film, in 2001. Daniel Calparsoro points out that shooting the film presented difficulties in terms of production, acting and directing. It was very expensive, since it was a combat film and this involved high costs of production in terms of special effects. In addition, the film was shot in Kosovo, Guadalajara, Madrid, Lleida and Huesca which

involved a significant investment in terms of the use of outside locations (DVD extras). Spanish war films are not a very common genre for Spanish spectators. In this respect, it is not coincidental that *Guerreros* is catalogued in the Ministry of Culture public catalogue as a drama rather than a war film.

*Guerreros* describes the experiences of a group of Spanish soldiers who have been sent to a recent war in Europe: the Balkan conflict. The director, Daniel Calparsoro who had previously directed introspective films such as *Salto al vacío* (1995), *Pasajes* (1996) and *Asfalto* (2000) portrays a war in which the Spaniards were involved through the UN forces. This is due to the globalisation of Spanish politics and society after many years of isolation under the dictatorship of Franco, and the fact that the Spanish army, which has recently become professional, has been sent to various international conflicts. However, the mission of the Spanish troops was to bring peace to the inhabitants of these countries and rebuild a country destroyed in Europe by years of conflict. According to Daniel Calparsoro this film is ‘a film of adventures which become nightmares, it is a youngsters’ trip towards the unknown and the exotic which ends up being hell’ (DVD extras). In other words, it is an introspective vision in which the characters face several violent combat events. It demonstrates how these characters change from an initial innocence and naivety into a group of soldiers who end up questioning why they are in this battlefield.

In *Guerreros*, the very title of the film identifies both the point of view, and the inherent violence of the content. The word ‘guerrero’ in Spanish can be considered a synonymous for ‘soldier’, and it is linked to the concept of war

which normally shows a conflict between two opposite sides. A further element of the film's narrative image, the film poster, is also representative of the main point of view of the film and the extreme violence which will be found throughout the film. The wounded face of two of the main soldiers looking at the spectator establishes this perspective of the story told by the soldiers. Furthermore, the juxtaposition of red and black colours and cold tones anticipates a story of conflicts and violence.

The film starts with a narrator, a voice of authority, contextualising the story of the film. The first images consist of the titles, soldiers and religious images which are combined to contextualise why this conflict appeared in this European region, as the main reason was a conflict of religions. Therefore, from the beginning of the film this atmosphere of verisimilitude is combined with aesthetics typical of a war film. For instance, the first sequence after the title is shot in wide shots, as commonly found in combat films. The spectator sees the massacre that results from the fighting between civilians and soldiers, not between opposite sides, which contextualises in another way what this conflict is about. The massacre sequence happens at night, which has the effect of hiding the possible consequences of war. Diegetic sound is initially used in order to dramatise this violent action until music begins when the title of the film appears on the screen in order to remind the spectator that this film is not a documentary, but a fiction film (Calparsoro, DVD extras).

The main characters of this film are soldiers: the main protagonist Vidal (Eloy Azorín), Lieutenant Alonso (Eduardo Noriega), and one of the two female

protagonists, Balbuena (Carla Pérez). When the characters appear on the screen, this sequence starts with a classic establishing shot of a village and the tanks, and a crane shot takes us to the place in which the soldiers are working as they are restoring a church. The camera introduces all the protagonists of this film, and after this brief introduction, the camera focuses on what Vidal is seeing, his perspective representing the main point of view of the film. He realises that some people want to attack one of the inhabitants of the village. The rest of the soldiers are also watching this but they react passively as they say: 'this is not our business, you heard Rubio'. Vidal ignores Rubio's orders and he reacts against a violent act among these people and decides to rescue its victim. He goes into the house in which a violent atmosphere is portrayed through the use of diegetic sound of the victims shouting, and he threatens the aggressors with a weapon. However, Vidal is not able to shoot the aggressors due to his naivety and he is finally beaten up by the aggressors and realises the victim is dead on the floor. Soldier Vidal expresses his impotence as he was not able to avoid the death of the victim and he says: 'I couldn't do anything'.

Traditionally, the privilege of the male experience is a common point of view offered in war films (Westwell 2006: 112). Normally 'where women and the 'feminine', appear in the war movie it is almost without fail in a subordinate role, most often to ensure the masculine ideal' (2006: 112). In addition, Westwell cites film scholar Susan Jeffords and points out that 'patriarchy underwrites war and war underwrites patriarchy and the contemporary war cinema ensures that both are ultimately endorsed as essential' (Westwell, 2006: 113). This is clearly what

happens in *Guerreros*. Although female characters appearing in the film, representing a sign of openness in the army, they are still portrayed as a secondary point of view in the context of a conflict.

Lieutenant Alonso, who is the leader of this group of soldiers, is introduced as a soldier who is responsible and rational, but later in the film he changes his point of view when one of the female characters is murdered. He does not know how to react after this violent act of murder and this is shown with a close up of his face which is shown completely paralysed and stunned. Vidal and Alonso are also repeatedly portrayed as rival characters in confrontation throughout the film. Their rivalry is also a stereotypical portrayal of soldiers in war cinema and it reinforces the patriarchal figure of male characters searching for their male virtues of power. It is therefore not coincidental that in this film violence is mainly shaped by the masculine point of view.

The perspective of the soldiers is also linked to the second and third elements of the contemporary cultural imagination of war: morality and identity. Morality is shown in this film following the American model of confrontation between good and evil. However, the difference in this film is that in this battle there is no clear enemy. Once the soldiers go into what they call the 'dark zone' (zona de sombra) they are fighting against unknown forces, and this might represent the irrationality of any war in which all become victims of this kind of confrontations. In this respect Calparsoro points out: 'I wanted to talk about the regression of the human being, his descent towards the archaic state. A story of an angel who turns evil because of the absurdity of war' (DVD extras). Therefore,

the military term 'dark zone' also signals an additional metaphorical meaning closer to a criticism and authorial insight by the director closer to the European cinema than a typical Hollywood film.

Non-diegetic sound also plays an important role in the representation of violence and morality. Naiwajeau's electronic music shows this absurdity in the lyrics of one of the songs featured in this film. Here are the original lyrics of this song:

Like arrows with a walking energy  
We'll make the footpath  
You are a bad soldier  
'Cause the closer you get to Cesar  
The biggest becomes the fear  
You lost the paradise  
I think we're getting in  
we're getting in (getting in)  
I'm a monkey.

Unknown future is not easy to get  
With this hunger and this subtle smell  
Trailing this nature that competes with itself  
All the monkeys are the same one  
Monkey see, monkey do  
I'm a monkey  
Monkey see, monkey do  
I'm a monkey  
I'm a monkey

The words present a metaphor of how the characters have been converted into human monkeys and in which the characters fall back on natural biological instincts, which are acted out by means of psychological and physical violence.

Although there is not a clear enemy in the film, the stereotypical figures of soldiers represent the good and heroic side of the Spanish soldiers who are there to rebuild the country and protect its inhabitants from any conflict. However, this

mission completely changes in the course of the film, as the characters also change from acting according to their idealistic vision into almost animalistic behaviour. The idealistic naïve vision of war is exemplified, for instance, in the sequence in which Lucas (Roger Casamajor) is playing a videogame. The director wanted to convey here the fact that the media is very much related to representations of violence, and how the public are used to watching violence on TV or videogames. The soldiers are not in a videogame, but rather they are involved in a real war, and indeed are the protagonists of a war in which they will end up being mere puppets. Lucas wants to be in the videogame as a protagonist and he does indeed become one of the main protagonists in this conflict. Whilst at the beginning of the film, the soldiers are naïve and keen to help, they will end up being mere machines in which there is no space for identity or morality.

Memory and violence are also significant components in war films, and *Guerreros* also represents an historical event from recent European history. Calparsoro portrays a recent Spanish and European sensibility towards the universal conflicts which become more and more globalised by international politics. According to critics such as Carlos Reviriego, Calparsoro makes neither a political nor an ideological analysis of the war (2002), typical of the social denouncement found in the films of Kusturica<sup>20</sup>. Instead, *Guerreros* is ‘an adventure film with certain anthropological pretensions’ (Calparsoro, DVD extras). Calparsoro’s film is not devoid of politics, but instead of delivering a political message, this film is more about how war is represented, and less about

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<sup>20</sup> Emir Kusturica is a Serbian director critically acclaimed for portraying a critical view on the Serbian history and war with films such as *Underground* (1995).

the ideologies represented by the opposite sides. Violence is not used in this film for social denunciation, but rather is used as a tool linked to the narrative and style mainly used in combat films in which spectacular violence is normally depicted.

Spectacular effects emphasise the violent scenes in various sequences in the film. One good example of graphic violence is the sequence in which the soldiers try to hide in the fields and a mine explodes. In a long shot, the director shows how the characters stay still and after a few seconds of silence, the spectators see an astonished Lieutenant Alonso. Then, the director uses a long shot to show us the effect of this explosion: the interpreter is lying on the ground and the spectator can hear her scream of pain, as she has been mutilated by the explosion. A close-up shows the spectator parts of the body spread out on the ground, gory images which are followed by shooting, and in several long shots, the spectators see how the protagonists try to hide from the paramilitaries. According to Calparsoro, he had initially decided to use long shots in order to add verisimilitude to the scene with techniques which are similar to documentaries, e.g. the use of hand-held camera (DVD audio commentary). When one of the soldiers goes to rescue the interpreter, the spectator will face one of the most psychologically and physically violent scenes in the film. With a medium close-up the spectators witness how Vidal suffocates the interpreter so that she does not have to suffer any longer. Calparsoro affirms that he starts to focus more on the psychology of the protagonists from this sequence onwards.

Later in the film when soldiers Valbuena and Vidal are escaping from the hospital in which they were held, several explosions are shown while they try to

run away, with slow camera motion, a shutter speed which allows us to see some debris flying in detail after explosions, and diegetic sound and orchestral music which emphasise the dramatisation of the scene. Later in this sequence, the mise-en-scène is modified, for example, the clothing of the main characters changes, they are not wearing uniforms anymore; they wear clothes which represent the total destruction of this war environment. According to Calparsoro, he is not worried about portraying verisimilitude here; he just wants to show the emotion of a human catastrophe through the way the characters are portrayed. It is about converting the characters into 'beasts', almost like violent animals (DVD extras).

Explicit violence is part of the spectacle features of this genre which fulfils public expectations. Hence, in *Guerreros* violence is represented in close relation to those four elements of the contemporary cultural imagination of war, and despite the fact that Calparsoro pursues an entertaining film of adventures he also tries to reflect on violent conflicts and their effects on our societies. This means that Calparsoro creates a hybrid film situated between the typical aesthetics of Hollywood war films showing a different cultural imagination and representation of war and some of the features of social denouncement which are more typical of European films.

In the second part of this chapter, I will look at how violence and the cultural representation of war are differently portrayed in *Silencio Roto*, a film which is representative of the majority of war melodramas about the Spanish Civil and post-civil War. Whilst in *Guerreros* violence is shown through a series of explicit scenes of combat and spectacular effects in which the soldiers are the

protagonists, in *Silencio Roto* violence is portrayed through the victims' perspective, and mainly through non-explicit scenes of physical and psychological violence.

*Silencio Roto* tells us the story of Lucía (Lucía Jiménez) on her return to her village in the winter of 1944. In this post-civil war context, she will meet again her friend Manuel (Juan Diego Botto), a young iron-smith who supports a group of 'maquis', rural guerrilla bands who fought against Franco's regime after the Spanish Civil War.<sup>21</sup> Lucía progressively not only discovers her love for Manuel, but also finds out about Manuel's secret support for the 'maquis'. In this journey towards 'better times', Lucía will find out that the inhabitants of this village are oppressed by the horror of Franco's dictatorship, an oppression which is manifest in a latent silence, which will be broken by a series of violent acts between the guerrillas and Franco's supporters.

Only a few films have dealt with the topic of 'los maquis' in the history of Spanish cinema and since the beginning of the Spanish democracy after Franco's dictatorship: *Los días del pasado* (Mario Camus, 1978), *El corazón del bosque* (Manuel Gutiérrez Aragón, 1979) and *Luna de lobos* (Julio Sánchez Valdés, 1987) are the three main films which have portrayed these guerrilla groups, each from a different perspective. During the dictatorship, in films such as *Dos caminos* (Arturo Ruiz Castillo, 1954), *Torrepartida* (Pedro Lazaga, 1956) y *La paz empieza nunca* (León Klimovsky, 1960), the 'maquis' were mainly portrayed as traitors of the homeland and as murderers of defenders of the Spanish

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<sup>21</sup> The name of 'maquis' was originally used for the rural guerrilla band of French resistance. Later, this name was also adopted by the guerrilla bands who opposed Franco's regime.

fatherland (Franco's supporters) (Heredero, 1999b: 217). With the exception of *Los días del pasado* what they all have in common is their point of view; the male characters' perspective, which perpetuates the masculine point of view of war films following the pattern of Hollywood films in terms of characterisation. However, *Silencio roto* portrays a different cultural representation of war, since the point of view of the film is dominated by the female characters in a village in which their daily routine is shaped by the violent acts in a conflict between the 'maquis' and the fascists. The spectator is a witness of the women's silence, which is broken during the film with the hope of getting a better life for future generations, as the title of the film indicates.

In addition, the film poster, which is part of its overall narrative image, presents the title in broken red letters, which also represent the blood which is going to be shed in order to break the repressive silence of the inhabitants. However, most of the space of the poster is occupied by the pictures of Lucía and her boyfriend kissing each other, and Manuel holding on his left hand a weapon which implies that violence will interfere in their relationship. Their love will lead the spectator to think that a love story forms part of a melodramatic genre presented in a context in which dark times are predominant. This is expressed by the Bertolt Brecht quotation on the poster which will appear later in the film:

In the dark times, will there also be singing?  
Yes, there will be singing about the dark times

It is not coincidental that this quotation is used as it initially helps to set the tone of the film and gives a contextualisation of the action in dark and oppressive times, in which some notes of optimism are represented by the singing

notes of the lyrics. That these are dark times (parallel to the 'dark zone' in *Guerreros*), is emphasised by the black clothes that the two characters are wearing; the cold, bluish tone of the poster reinforces the nature of their psychological state during the times of dictatorship.

The film starts with a long shot of the mountains. There is silence, except for the realistic effects of the diegetic sounds of nature such as birds and the wind. However, this silence is immediately broken by the noise of gun shots which create the tone of conflict and violence that will predominate. Then, the camera tilts into the fog and the title of the film appears, implying that this silence which has been broken will also prevail in the film. Then a dissolve takes the spectator into the bright colours of autumn of 1944. A long shot of the mountains and a bus on the road is used to establish the main point of view of the film. The spectator will adopt for a few seconds the position of Lucía, though without being aware of this, as a shot of a little village is shown through the windows of the bus, but without indication of whose point of view is being adopted. This initial sequence provides the spectator with a contextualisation which indicates that these violent actions could be found in any place in rural Spain, as the village is an anonymous one.

Then, there is a cut from this shot into another of the bus arriving at the main square of the village where there is apparent tranquillity. Lucía, the main character of the film, is here presented to the spectator, and through her we are introduced to the main protagonists in the film: her family, especially Teresa (Mercedes Sampietro), her aunt, and finally, Manuel. When Lucía goes to meet

Manuel in the forge, the initial tranquillity is broken by a group of civil guards carrying a corpse on a horse. In this case, violence is presented indirectly as the spectator only sees the arms of the corpse followed by a close-up of its hands. The tone of the music completely changes into string music which emphasises the effect of this violent act and the emotional strain that the characters suffer as they see the outcome without being able to do anything and having to keep silent. Then, Lucía asks Manuel: ‘What’s wrong?’, which initially shows her innocence as she does not know what is happening, and she is not aware that there are still people in the village fighting against Franco’s dictatorship in the mountains.

The silence is emphasised again in the next scene when several women next to the Guardia Civil (Civil Guards) headquarters try to identify the covered corpse. Here, the spectator starts to be aware that the film is mainly about women’s point of view and their silence, a silence which metaphorically emphasises the repression of the inhabitants of this village. A tense atmosphere is portrayed in the several cuts of medium shot of the civil guards and women, also emphasised by violin chords again. Then, this time silence is broken by a civil guard who uncovers the corpse and says: ‘It is not one of yours, but don’t build up your hopes, sooner or later, it will be their turn’. The answer of those women is a mixture of silence and relief as they know that the victim is not a member of their families. In the next sequence, Lucía still seems to ignore the ongoing conflict and violent acts as she says to her aunt: ‘But the war finished years ago’, then her aunt responds: ‘There are wars and wars, my dear, and there are wars which never finish, like this one’.

According to Pierre Sorlin war films portray war ‘as the sum of heroic actions carried out by a handful of individuals’ (1994: 360). Whilst in *Guerreros* the sum of the heroic actions is portrayed from the perspective of the soldiers, here the heroic actions are depicted by the female actions against the soldiers’ violence. *Silencio roto* offers points of view which focus on the psychological effects of violence on the inhabitants, and specifically, the women who were often sidelined in representations of war, as they were more generally sidelined by Spanish society in the years of the dictatorship. As Westwell points out: ‘war is bound by an economy that shows conflict as a total, overwhelming psychological experience’ (2006: 110). This is what happens in *Silencio roto*; the spectator, through the eyes of the female characters, is aware of their psychological repression, and therefore women, who are portrayed as the ‘other’ less obvious victims of wars, become quotidian heroes of the war. Montxo Armendáriz, the director, justifies the use of the collective perspective of women: ‘What I was looking for was a point of view which helped me to talk about the topic in which I was interested, that is why I finally chose the collective perspective of women as I wanted to tell the story from the experiences of those who stayed in the village and helped those who were in the mountains’ (DVD extras).

Paul Grainge in his book on memory and film points out that ‘cinema has become central to the mediation of memory in modern cultural life’ (2003: 1) and war films are part of that cultural memory. As Westwell affirms, ‘war is a key building block in the formation of cultural memory and the war movie genre is one of the primary ways in which past wars are recalled, re-enacted and re-

scripted' (2006: 113). Hence, war films in their different sub-genres function as a tool for the remembrance of violent episodes in our modern history. This is precisely the main goal of *Silencio roto*. As the director points out, the film is based on a story 'that young people need to be told as youngsters are the ones who need to know about the past', and therefore *Silencio roto* tries to remind people that 'the present does not emerge from an spontaneous generation, but rather it is the result of a series of life experiences' (DVD extras).

However, it is important to consider that memory can be shaped by the director's interpretations using a collective fictional world based on different cinematic codes. These codes portray violence in different forms. Whilst in *Guerreros*, violence was represented mainly with explicit depictions in its combat scenes, *Silencio roto* portrays physical and psychological violence in an intimate way. *Silencio roto* is not a combat film, but a melodrama, and therefore focuses on the perspective of Lucía who represents a collective memory. As Fernández Prieto points out, memory is told in the first person, while history is told in the third person (2005: 276). However, what are the aesthetic and cinematic codes which help to represent this collective imaginary and emphasise the violent nature of war in this film?

An example of these codes is the music in this film. 'Music is a highly significant code in this cinematic patterning of memory, instrumental to the pleasures of 'pastness' that characterise retro's particular feel and meaning' (Grainge, 2003:17). In *Guerreros* music was used in many combat scenes to emphasise the massacre, and in *Silencio roto*, music is also used to emphasise

these violent actions but focuses more on the psychological effects on the main characters. Therefore, this film functions as a commitment towards the memory of the results of the Spanish civil war confrontations and its violent consequences. As the director also indicates, violence is also used as a tool for remembrance of past events in this film so that new generations do not forget what happened (DVD extras).

Two further aspects which should be considered when analysing violence and the contemporary cultural imagination of war are morality and identity. In *Silencio roto* these two aspects appear more ambiguous, as we do not get the typical representations of good versus evil which is normally found in American war films. The two sides in *Silencio roto* are portrayed by the civil guards which initially may represent the evil forces, as from the beginning of the film they are portrayed as the dictatorial forces of the post-war Spain. However, the ‘maquis’ are also portrayed in an ambiguous way. At the beginning of the film, they are depicted as groups of people who are still fighting against Franco’s forces. However, with the use of violence in two juxtaposed execution sequences, the director portrays two sides which are not polarised. In fact, violence will be the aspect which will link the two apparent opposite sites. The first of these almost parallel executions occurs when the ‘maquis’ capture one of the fascist citizens, and he is executed in front of Lucía, so that the spectator also adopts her point of view. In this scene, the spectator witnesses an explicit act of violence which emphasises the fact that the use of violence brings both sides to the most horrific human acts. Whatever the ideology its use defends, violence incorporates the most

unpalatable features of the human race. With a medium shot, the spectator sees how one of the 'maquis' shoots this character with a machine gun, and then this shot cuts to a medium shot of the stunned expression on Lucía's face which emphasises her response to that violent act. Then, she looks at Manuel, and her emotional restraint accurately expresses disapproval of this violent act and she runs away from the place.

In the following sequence, civil guards capture don Hilario, the teacher who has been hiding in Teresa's house. Some civil guards take don Hilario, Lucía and her aunt to headquarters. When don Hilario hits a civil guard and tries to escape, the spectator witnesses another explicit execution as Hilario is murdered by him. A medium shot of don Hilario being shot and his body falling to the ground in the darkness emphasise this time that neither side in this conflict is reasonable. Hence, explicit violence is used in both scenes to emphasise the dark side of human minds.

A final execution seems to bring the climactic part of the film to an end as Manuel and Lucía's aunt are executed. However, in this case, the director decides not to show it on screen. The spectator sees how both Manuel and Teresa are taken outside and a medium shot of Lucía's face anticipates the dramatic scene. The actress' expression seems to convey the containment of her feelings of impotence and she transmits that suspense to the spectator who does not know if this violent act is going to happen. Absolute silence predominates for a few seconds, a silence immediately broken by the noise of the machine guns which confirms this cruel act. Then, Lucía breaks into tears and a close-up of the

expressionless face of the civil guard, whose lack of remorse illustrates the contrast between the repressor and the repressed, the latter symbolised by Lucía.

*Silencio roto* offers the spectator a more complex and ambiguous portrayal of a cultural representation of war, and violence is used in order to emphasise the ambiguity of identity and morality, as there is no element of polarisation and the film does not depict simple stereotypes on either sides. As the director affirms: ‘There is horror on both sides: nobody can escape, because violence leads to absolute injustice and finally, to destruction for the sake of destruction’ (DVD extras). Hence, violence is not only used to emphasise this ambiguity but also as a tool for social denunciation of the dark side of Spain.

The film has a circular structure with Lucía leaving the village on a bus at the end of the narrative, but in this case, after her experience of the horror of post-war Spain. Whilst at the beginning of the film the main square of the village was full of people, now it is completely empty and abandoned. In addition, cold tones predominate in the mise-en-scène which carries the symbolic meaning of a completely destroyed village whose inhabitants will have to continue using silence as a way of protecting themselves from the dictatorial forces. However, a symbolic element of hope is the close-up of Lucía’s face when she smiles slightly, and in addition, with the rainbow which is seen over the mountains. This sense of hope which is also emphasised by Bertolt Brecht’s words which were mentioned at the beginning of this section, a symbolic element of that Spain that had to continue fighting in silence against Franco’s dictatorship. Thus, the film does offer some optimism about Spain’s capacity to emerge from its dark past.

An altogether more contemporary and, also, less culturally specific representation of war is offered in *Territorio Comanche*, a film based on an autobiographical novel written by one of the most popular Spanish writers worldwide: Arturo Pérez Reverte. It is worth mentioning that he was also a war correspondent for Televisión Española (TVE) (the Spanish State owned television) for 21 years (1973-1994). A few years later he contributed to the script of *Territorio Comanche*.

The film tells the story of war correspondents in the context, as in *Guerreros*, of the Bosnian war which lasted from 1992 to 1995. In the middle of the destruction of the city of Sarajevo, correspondents from all over the world gather in a hotel. Gerardo Herrero presents a war drama in which the main characters are three Spanish reporters. Two of them are men, Mikel Uriarte and José Márquez played by Imanol Arias and Carmelo Gómez respectively who, according to Maroto-Camino, fictionally represent Pérez Reverte and his cameraman, José Luís Márquez (2005: 119). The other correspondent is the female protagonist, Laura Riera, played by the Argentinean Cecilia Dopazo. It is the first time that Laura has worked as a war correspondent and although she has some problems with her male colleagues at the beginning, Mikel helps her to learn from the violent situations she is reporting and they become lovers. In the course of the film, Laura loses her innocence about the reality of a war-torn region, faces an extremely violent situation, and becomes a witness of this conflict, a perspective with which the spectators will be identified as they share her naivety.

Like her, they are not familiar with this conflictual context and may not have been in a war.

Drawing now on the concept of cultural imagination of war, the distinctive perspective of this film in contrast to the other two texts analysed in this chapter is one which has hardly ever been explored in cinema. This film appears to take a middle position in comparison with the two films already analysed. It is neither a combat film, nor a typical drama which shows one of the sides of the war. Instead it is a war drama which offers the perspectives of the journalists present in a conflict. Therefore, I will argue that this new perspective shown in *Territorio Comanche* contributes to shaping a different representation of violence and war, one which I will now analyse.

With regard to the narrative image of the film, the poster anticipates the conflict and violence to be shown in the film as well as the main perspective; it shows the two journalists and the cameraman as the target of a bull's eye which also points at the camera that José is carrying. In the background an explosion is shown, and while the female protagonist wears a helmet, the male protagonists do not seem to need any kind of protection. In her article, Mercedes Maroto-Camino claims that the film's use of gender stereotypes, in which 'men demonstrate their bravery and masculinity' (2005: 122), works against the main goals of the film: to criticise war and to pay homage to the journalists who have lost their lives in this war (2005). However, I would argue that although these gender stereotypes do not help to present a balanced point of view of both male and female protagonists, in

contrast, representations of violence and its aesthetics intensify the social critique which is one of the main objectives of this film.

The title of *Territorio Comanche* already suggests a conflict and a violent atmosphere as it also suggests the battles between tribes which appear in the Western genre films (Maroto-Camino, 2005: 120). Pérez Reverte describes the meaning of the title:

For a reporter in a war, this (Comanche Territory) is the place where instinct tells you to stop the car and turn back. The place where the roads are empty and houses are burnt-out ruins, where it always seems that night is about to fall and you walk pressed against the walls towards shooting that can be heard far away, while listening to the noise of your own footsteps on broken glass. Comanche Territory is the place where we hear the glass crack under your boots and, even though you see nobody, you know you are being watched. Where you do not see guns, but they do see you (Pérez Reverte, 2000: 17).<sup>22</sup>

This is exactly the violent atmosphere which will be shown throughout the film, in which as Maroto-Camino suggests the journalists are cowboys and their cameras represent guns (2005: 123).

The predominant point of view in the film is the one represented by the journalists and the cameramen. Mikel and José are two journalists who have wide experience of being war correspondents, whilst Laura is a new war correspondent who as a passive character at the beginning of the film does not seem to be able to cope with the situation, something which will change as the film progresses. As the director points out: ‘she is the only character who changes in the film, I wanted to portray an inexperienced young woman so that this change would be credible. She is the only one who changes her vision of life and work. Her

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<sup>22</sup> Translated by Maroto-Camino (2005: 123)

perspective is the most important one because she also represents the spectator who doesn't know about the war either' (Gerardo Herrero in Fernández Santos, 1997b).

After the initial establishing shots in which a grey, misty and empty Sarajevo is presented in the *mise-en-scène*, the first characters to be introduced are Mikel and José who are filming some people in the streets of the city of Sarajevo. The spectator witnesses a conflict between the journalists and some inhabitants of Sarajevo, since one of them tries to take the camera off José. Mikel then says: 'they love you so much until they start to lose'. With these words, it is shown how the role of correspondents introduces an additional conflict to the war as they need to show the conflict from both sides. Therefore, this initial sequence helps to establish the point of view of the film which will certainly present a different and more belligerent and complex cultural representation of war since from the journalists' perspectives the conflict becomes a double one. They are not only reflecting a conflict between two sides, but actually coming into conflict themselves with each side, due to their power, as the media, to represent the conflict.

Laura's initial inexperience is shown in one of the first sequences when she arrives at the Holiday Inn hotel in a tank. When she goes towards the main entrance of the building someone, that we do not see, seems to shoot her. Then the spectator starts to be aware of the vulnerability of the characters in this violent environment. From the very beginning of the film the spectator gets this idea expressed by Pérez Reverte, in the description of his eponymous novel, about the

Comanche territory where you do not see anybody but you know that someone is seeing you (Fernández Santos, 1997a).

Imanol Arias, in one of the interviews in *El País*, says that what they wanted to portray was the ‘work and everyday routine of some human beings in the middle of the wildest violence’ (Sánchez, 1996). This is precisely what happens throughout the film; this sense of their quotidian lives will be intertwined with violent confrontations in which, most of the time the spectator will not see who the aggressors are.

Violence is also presented in a double perspective; which is also reflected by the use of different elements in the *mise-en-scène*. We, the spectators, look through the eyes of the reporters, but also through their cameras. These two different perspectives within fiction are clearly separated by the use of black and white photography which is shown when the spectators are seeing through the lens of the camera itself (diegetic images), and colour, when the source of the screen image is non-diegetic.

Colour alternates with black and white in various sequences in the film. Edward Buscombe in his article on sound and colour argues that the use of colour was not accepted as a way of transmitting reality as this would distort what we are seeing. He says ‘colour would serve to distract the audience from those elements of the film which carried forward the narrative: acting, facial expression, “the action”’ (Buscombe, 2002: 81). Therefore, this technique of using black and white images intends to convey to the spectator a sense of objectivity, as if it was a depiction of certain historic events in a documentary. Neale argues that the use

of colour in certain genres - such as musicals and science fiction films - may transmit a verisimilitude which is not attached to realistic conventions, but in genres like war films or documentaries, the use of colour may be considered to distort the reality (Neale, 2002: 86).

Hence, the intention of using this technique is to reflect a more real environment which will indeed have an impact on the spectator with the use of these brutal images. In addition, the intention is to mitigate the bloody scenario that the spectator is witnessing. Black and white images may have less impact on the audience, though at the same time they depict reality and authenticity. It is therefore not a coincidence that some of the most violent scenes in the film are initially portrayed in black and white, and after a few seconds, the point of view changes to that seen from the non-diegetic cameras.

A good example of this technique is shown in one of the sequences in which the director utilises a similar technique which recurs several times throughout the film. First of all, he evokes the violent atmosphere off-screen, which means that with diegetic sound, the spectator hears the shouting of victims as well as the noise of bombs and artillery, but initially sees neither blood nor victims. There is a sequence in which Mikel starts filming a report when suddenly a series of explosions occurs. Mikel and José start to run away from the scene, but José keeps filming. The spectator then sees people running and escaping from this violent scene. Here the director uses the point of view of the camera in black and white to show us injured and dead people, and finally the image changes to colour

to show the desperation of people in this context, rather than the bloody images of the scene.

With regard to the concepts of identity and morality, since the main perspective is not that of the soldiers or the victims on either side of the confrontation, this new point of view does not favour either side. What the spectator sees could come from either of the two sides in the conflict, the conflict does not seem to be justified, and there is no distinction between good and evil forces. In fact, anybody in this war can be transformed into an aggressor or a victim. This is clearly shown with the words that Laura uses: 'Today it's the first time in my life that I have seen a murder, and the assassin is like you or like me...you will see the faces of the Devil much closer than you could imagine'.

This is just after a sequence in which we see Laura with a sniper who could represent any of the aggressors from either side, and who is waiting to shoot anyone who walks along the middle of the street, thus killing an anonymous innocent victim. The director also questions here the fact that the journalists cannot do anything to avoid these violent acts, they are just there as mere witnesses, like us, the spectators (Fernández-Santos, 1997b). Initially, through the lens of the camera and in black and white images we see how the victim is killed by three shots. After these three shots, there is a close up of Laura's face which transmits the shock and the impotence that she feels as she has witnessed this violent act but she does nothing to avoid it. Herrero here poses the same question to the spectator, as this makes the spectator think about the position of Laura and if we would have done the same thing in her place (Fernández Santos, 1997a).

As Mikel says to Julia: ‘The war takes the best and the worst of us, what happened to you is nothing new...here people are killed and people die everyday, and even if you try to avoid it, it always affects you. This is the reality and there is no other’. And the director using these fiction and metafiction techniques wants us to make us more aware of those different realities and points of view. This use of metafiction becomes obvious when the spectator sees through the lens of the camera as he changes colour into black and white images. As Patricia Waugh puts it: ‘Metafiction does not abandon ‘the real world’ for the narcissitic pleasures of the imagination. What it does is to re-examine the conventions of realism in order to discover - through its own self-reflection - a fictional form which is culturally relevant and comprehensible to contemporary readers’ (1984: 18). In this case, the spectator witnesses two different fictional realities which use dissimilar conventions to portray a violent conflict.

This is also shown in the sequence after the reporters have visited the hospital in which a doctor tells them that they have almost nothing to help the injured patients. Just after this conversation, we see black and white images in which naked dead bodies are shown, and in which women, men, and children are shown to be the innocent victims of this violent conflict. The reporters cannot stand these images of horror, they are seized by nausea and also, as spectators we become closer to that atrocious ‘reality’ than if we were present there shooting this sickening scene.

Other elements of the mise-en-scène also reinforce this sense of verisimilitude. In the case of *Territorio Comanche*, the use of real locations and

real places which were destroyed during the war emphasises the consequences of this violent conflict and therefore, help to remind us what happened at the time. As film critic Carlos Boyero points out: ‘Gerardo Herrero uses a real and horrible scenario which shows you that you are not seeing a set, not a built devastation, but you can feel what the camera is filming and the microphones are reproducing something authentic’ (1997).

In fact, this use of real locations increased the cost of the film, and, like any war film showing scenes of combat, was very expensive for a Spanish budget. According to an article in *El País*, the film cost 4.5 million dollars and it was shot in Sarejevo, Zagreb and Split over nine weeks. The film crew also had to hire two different teams, one in Bosnia and another one in Croatia in order to avoid any conflict between the two sides, just as if they were shooting two different films (Fernández Santos, 1997b). This possible conflict between reality and the film also occurred when the film crew was surrounded by the post-conflict French peace-keeping troops as they were filming, since the soldiers thought their weapons were real ones (*El País*, 1996). This also demonstrates how reality and conflict could also affect fiction since the conflict was still happening at the time.

In addition to these elements of the *mise-en-scène* (use of black and white images and use of real locations), the violent representations of this event and the way these violent representations are depicted also help to portray a historical memory which should not be forgotten, something that becomes part of the morality of the film. This is also emphasised when director dedicates the film to the fifty-five reporters who died during this violent conflict and to the inhabitants

of Sarajevo. The victims should be remembered, and the cinema, with its different representations of violence, helps us remember what happened in history so that future generations are aware of what happened.

In conclusion, all these cinematic representations of violence shape different cultural imaginations of war in the three films studied. In *Silencio roto* most violent acts are portrayed off screen, and as a melodrama, it is one of the few Spanish films which focus on the female perspective, concentrating on the psychological violence of war. This violence is portrayed with a series of cinematic features which emphasise those violent acts with off-screen techniques; as the director points out, he wanted to play with the non-visible effects which can be even more powerful in the audience than the effects of explicit violence. In addition, these violent representations portray a different cultural imagination of war as the two sides in the conflict are not polarised. With portrayals of psychological and physical violence on both sides, the director also pursues the use of violence as a social denunciation of wars in the recent memory of Spanish history and as a tool for the recovery of historic memory in Spain; a memory which was ignored for many years during the post-Franco era (Labanyi, 2000: 66). Therefore, *Silencio roto* is representative of those films which aim at a cultural and social remembering of the past, and different representations of violence are used in order to commit to memory this episode in recent Spanish history.

*Territorio Comanche* presents a different cultural imagination of war since it depicts an outsider perspective as the protagonists do not represent either side in

the conflict. The director presents us with a violent fictional world which seems to be more objective through the use of certain metafiction devices in the film. In addition, physical and psychological violence are portrayed with the main purpose of showing the spectator a historical conflict which deserves to be remembered. Furthermore, off-screen and explicit representations of violence are also portrayed in the film, some of them quite spectacular, a factor that may also make the film more appealing to wider and younger audiences. This will be explored more in detail later in Chapter Six.

The case of *Guerreros* situates the film in a different dimension to the other two films studied here. This film is mainly aimed at young audiences and violence is explicitly depicted, using techniques which are close to those of American combat films and it shapes a different cultural representation of war in which the main protagonists are the soldiers, and therefore representative of the masculine point of view commonly found in war films. However, although this film is aimed at younger audiences and uses violence as part of the cinematic spectacle, it does not wholly follow the classic American models of cultural representations of wars as it also portrays a war with neither losers nor winners, an ambiguity which is more representative of the European film tradition. Finally, violence is not used in *Guerreros* to commit to memory as a means of historic recovery, but rather to commit to the aesthetics of representations of wars which are closer to the generic and stylistic features of the American combat films.

Finally, based on the analysis of the three films studied here, it can be said that war films and their representations of violence depict various perceptions of

war, showing different cultural imaginaries which also represent and defend national identities. Whilst in American cinema these cultural imaginaries try to justify and endorse war and only a few of them are critical of the imperialistic point of view (Westwell, 2006: 114), contemporary Spanish war films portray a different perception, one which is more critical of these violent events and whose main purpose is not to glorify war and show the winning side, but rather to demystify it, showing that there is no plausible justification for this kind of violent conflict.

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## *Chapter Five*

### *Re-examining Violence and Reconstructing the Psychopath*

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There are few studies of films featuring psychopaths or serial killers in published work in Spanish cinema. This reflects the virtual absence of such figures in Spanish cinema until relatively recently. However, films dealing with psychopaths have begun to appear since the 1990s, due perhaps to recent changes in the social, economic and contextual environment which transformed the Spanish film industry. This changing context includes a greater industrial awareness of public demand, of the market and of the types of films that do well in other markets (Jordan and Allinson, 2005: 28). As well as the re-emergence of some genres which had been forgotten during the period of ‘cine de calidad’ (quality cinema), this period sees the emergence of some new genres and sub-genres, including that of the psychopath/serial killer film, discussed in this chapter, and the adolescent-targeted genres discussed in Chapter Six. As mentioned in earlier chapters, in contrast to this quality cinema formula, new directors have created hybrid films mixing together elements of the entertainment formula, mostly influenced by the Hollywood models, and more local and European elements, such as the socio-political critique of violent genres or the prevalence of directorial choices influenced by a more European sensibility, both examples will be found in the case studies here.

In this study, the methodology of analysis incorporates work from the fields of film studies, mass media, psychology and sociology. Violence will also be analysed, taking into account Prince's approach focusing on stylistic representations (2001: B18-B19). The chapter will establish whether or not all of these stylistic characteristics are also representative of Spanish cinema. I will question whether the character of the psychopath and its representations of violence in the specific context of Spanish cinema vary in comparison with the most common and recent portraits of psychopaths in American cinema.

I will focus on the analysis of three films: *Tesis* (Alejandro Amenábar, 1996), *Plenilunio* (Imanol Uribe, 2000) and *Las horas del día* (Jaime Rosales, 2003). First of all, I will review different studies which have been undertaken on psychopaths in both American and European cinema, considering in particular the way in which they are defined by different social disciplines. Following this, I will focus on the analysis of the main characters, the perpetrators of violence, and analyse the different forms of violence shaped by different cinematic and generic conventions.

In the *British Film Institute Companion to Horror*, a psychopath is defined as 'a raving madman, bent on multiple murders and usually armed with something sharp'. Such characters are also referred to as 'serial killers' (Newman, 1996: 261). The psychopath has appeared throughout the history of cinema in its multiple representations in characters such as Norman Bates in *Psycho* (Alfred Hitchcock, 1960), Henry in *Henry: Portrait of a Serial Killer* (John McNaughton 1986), Dr. Hannibal Lecter in *Silence of the Lambs* (Jonathan Demme, 1990), and

Patrick Bateman in *American Psycho* (Mary Harron, 2000). These fictional characters are related to the horror genre whose origins are connected to the tradition of the Gothic literature of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Serial killers are also a ‘popularised’ phenomenon of real life, created through real crimes and media mythification. Neale examines how these figures changed during the Hollywood horror films of the 1930s and 1940s. According to film scholar Fred Botting, ‘figures of menace, destruction and violence’ now tend to be ‘mad scientists, psychopaths, extraterrestrials’ (Botting, 2001: 94). These threatening figures have been personified in other types of characters and the psychopath is one of the most representative of these personifications.

The figure of the psychopath has also appeared in European cinema in classic films such as *M* (Fritz Lang, 1931) and also in more recent films. Frank Lafond (2002) makes an explicit reference to recent Spanish horror films such as *Tuno negro* (Pedro L. Barbero and Vicente J Martín, 2001) or *Fausto 5.0* (Alex Ollé, Isidro Ortiz and Carlos Padrisa, 2001). *Tuno negro* combines characteristic elements of the American slasher<sup>23</sup> films with certain historical contexts and older traditions. The action is set in the historic University of Salamanca where ‘tunos’ (male students in university music associations) who get the lowest marks are assassinated by a serial killer at the end of each academic year. As Lafond points out, these local elements clearly differentiate this film from those in the vein of *Scream* (2002) which subtly normalise generic (non-localised) US locations into a putative universal everywhere (2002).

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<sup>23</sup> Slasher films are a sub-genre of horror film in which a psychopathic killer stalks and murders a series of adolescent victims (Rockoff, 2002: 5)

Whilst in terms of cinematic models, different kinds of psychopaths have appeared throughout the history of cinema, does the term have a clear meaning outside of the cinematic context? In disciplines such as psychology, psychiatry and sociology the definition of psychopath remains unclear, as each discipline defines the term from a different perspective. For example, one of the experts in the study of psychopathy is Canadian psychologist Robert Hare. His article reviews some of the definitions of the psychopath. He admits that psychopathy has been studied for centuries and he defines it as a personality disorder which is not only a product of social and environmental influences but also biological factors (2001: 6).

Psychologist Vicente Garrido explains in his book *El psicópata* that the media normally describes psychopaths as people who are mentally ill or psychotic. Garrido claims that the most common psychopath is the one who is an otherwise normal person with a personality disorder, who acts rationally and who is very much aware of what he/she is doing. A psychotic, however, is not aware of his-her violent acts (2003: 29). Hence, Garrido's concept of the psychopath is a wider one, as this notion is closer to social reality, and this definition will be considered in this study.

Nowadays, the term 'psychopath' is hardly used in psychiatry, whilst in the 1960s some authors started to use the term 'sociopath' instead of psychopath. The American Association of Psychiatry introduced the term 'antisocial personality' to define psychopathy as an antisocial personality disorder (Garrido 2003: 33).

How can a psychopath be defined then in terms of their personality? Media scholar Manuel Garrido Lora compiles the typical main characteristics of psychopaths taken from different sociologists, psychologists and psychiatrists: psychopaths<sup>24</sup> who have received little affection from their parents, are subject to harsh discipline, and feel a huge affective gap. They can be very charming; they believe people have a hostile attitude towards them; they have an advanced command of language; they are hugely communicative people; as partners, they are dominant and jealous, they do not subscribe to norms or social conventions; egocentrism and narcissism are their prominent psychological features, they take pleasure in dominating people; they love humiliating people and feeling power over them. These characteristics, which relate to their exhibition of violent tendencies, can be grouped into three areas: human contact, language and power (2004: 79).

We now need to address some of the questions about psychopathic characters in cinema: Are some of above characteristics present in the portrayal of psychopath in film and how are these characteristics related to the representations of violence? Are the psychopaths portrayed in a realistic way, or are they stereotypically depicted? Why is the figure of the psychopath so popular in the cinema and the media?

Media scholar W. James Potter, as mentioned in the introduction, points out that one of the myths is that ‘violence in the media reflects violence in society’ (2003: 103), and he remarks that this myth is very much present in films

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<sup>24</sup> This study will predominantly use the more scientific and more controversial term ‘psychopath’ over the more cinematic, popularised term ‘psycho’.

about serial murders. He points out that ‘this sort of brutality occurs far more often in books and movies than in real life’ (2003: 112). Indeed, according to different crime consultants, serial killings are remarkably infrequent. According to the FBI statistics he mentions, serial murderers only represent one seventh of 1% of American murders (Potter, 2003: 113). However, this again depends on the definition of the psychopath: if we consider a wider concept, as in the case of Vicente Garrido (2003), who does not necessarily regard the psychopath as a serial murderer, then the ‘realism’ present in films is perhaps closer to real life and real crimes.

In film studies varied work has been carried out on psychopaths in American and European cinema. Simpson, in his book *Psychopaths, Tracking the Serial Killer through Contemporary American Film and Fiction* provides us with a good review of the character of the psychopath in the North American novel and cinema. Here, he includes references to *Henry: Portrait of a Serial Killer*, pointing out that the psychopath, the protagonist of the film, is portrayed with the use of extreme violence; a violence which is condoned by an American society desensitised by the presence of violence in all kinds of contexts (Simpson, 2000: 139). On the other hand, the character of Bateman in Ellis’ novel *American Psycho*, and in the eponymous film, is portrayed from a distance, which allows the audience to remain attentive despite the excessive violence presented. According to Jurchartz and Hunter ‘Ellis uses violence and greed, in their most extreme forms, as metaphors to reflect the real-life corruption in the world of his readers’ (Jurchartz and Hunter, 1996: 67). Consequently, the violence we find in the novel

is multiplied in the visual style of the film, an extreme use of violence highly noticeable from its very beginning. Leaving aside the analysis of novels in his book, Simpson mainly refers to three films in which the psychopath character appears: *Natural Born Killers* (Oliver Stone, 1994), *Kalifornia* (Dominic Sena, 1993) and *Seven* (David Fincher, 1995). Again, in all three, violence becomes the most common feature of the narration.

There are indeed distortions in portraying the reality of violence, and Simpson points out that ‘the level of extreme physical violence present in these narratives, combined with a metaphysical subtext of cataclysmic apocalypse, tends to erase thematically any alternative, socially minded ideologies’ (2000: 17). In other words, excessive violence removes all traces of any ideologies which would be more visible without this extreme portrayal of violent acts. However, serial murders are metaphors of concerns facing contemporary societies, and therefore, ideology is indeed present despite this apparent invisibility (Simpson 2000: 17).

With regard to the Spanish cinema, Mark Allinson suggests that violence has become one of the main features of new Spanish cinema, especially after the limitations of Franco’s dictatorship were eased, which meant that Spanish cinema was ‘free’ ‘to incorporate violence on the basis of its market value’ (1997: 320). However, he also points out that the characters generally portrayed in the three case studies (*El día de la Bestia* (Alex de la Iglesia, 1995), *Nadie hablará de nosotras cuando hayamos muerto* (Agustín Díaz Yanes, 1995) and *Tesis*) he analyses do not simply become either ‘natural born killers’, or ‘matadors’. In

other words, the films neither adhere completely to American conventions, nor make use of local references as a formula for success with Spanish audiences. The different kinds of violence which appear in the films that Allinson analyses clearly establish a contrast among the different forms of violence normally found in American films, despite also having numerous features in common (1997: 328-9).

The directors of the films which will be studied in this chapter, Imanol Uribe, Alejandro Amenábar and Jaime Rosales can be considered as representative directors in Spanish cinema as all three have made films which can be considered successful as regards critical and public opinion. Moreover, they come from two different generations of film-makers. Uribe is a director who belongs to an older generation of film-makers, while for their part Amenábar and Jaime Rosales belong to a generation of new directors which appeared in the 1990s and 2000s. The selection of these three directors for this study allows for the tracing of potential generational influences in the representations of violence.

Amenábar is a young director who is part of a new generation of directors who, as mentioned earlier, emerged in the 1990s and who tends not to focus on the past history of Spain. Some critics point out that these newer directors focus on the production of more commercial films (Triana-Toribio, 2003: 143-144; Jordan and Morgan-Tamosunas, 1998: 2-4). Amenábar himself refers to the crisis of Spanish cinema in terms of audience and creation of films and he proposes a formula closer to a cinema of entertainment rather than seeing film as an exclusively artistic product. However, he also remarks that this cinema has to

establish its differences from American cinema, and he explains that these differences have to be based on the existence of a clear message. In his view,

Spain is among the countries where a high percentage of people go to the movies. But Spanish cinema is not present in cinemas. I want people to get rid of that fear of going to see Spanish films and the stigma of 'if it is a Spanish film I'm not going, because it has to be boring'. Spanish audiences tend to generalise with 'Spanish cinema' as a genre, and they don't go to see any film if it's Spanish. Therefore, I have tried to make a very entertaining film in terms of its design and screenplay. That doesn't mean that the film doesn't have an idea, a message to be transmitted...In fact, it is a film that I would have liked to see in the cinema. I think that entertainment is not placed in opposition to message and to content, something that is not displayed in the sort of American cinema that is only pure spectacle, with nothing behind the scenes which needs to be told (Vera and Badariotti, 2002: 21).

Amenábar, with the use of those elements, has become one of the most internationally recognised Spanish directors. His films *Abre los ojos* (1997), *The Others* (2001) and *Mar adentro* (2005) have been internationally acclaimed. In *The Others*, he even had the opportunity to work with an international cast and with Tom Cruise's production company which acquired the copyright to shoot the remake of *Abre los ojos* known as *Vanilla Sky* (Cameron Crowe, 2001). In all his films the topics of death and violence recur, including his latest production, *Mar adentro*, a melodrama telling the story of a famous paraplegic, played by Javier Bardem, who fought for the right to die. *Tesis*, his first feature film, tells the story of Ángela (Ana Torrent), a young protagonist who embarks on a doctoral thesis on violence in cinema. Whilst she tries to gather a corpus of violent films she is caught up in a network of people who are working in the snuff film business. After the death of her thesis supervisor, she gradually finds out that a psychopath, Bosco (Eduardo Noriega), is the main mover in this network. He murders young women and gets pleasure from killing people whose assassinations he films.

Chema (Fele Martínez), another student at university, helps her to track down the psychopath. Later in the film, Ángela is kidnapped by Bosco who intends to record her death in one of his films. This violent act maximises the suspense since it happens at almost the very end of the film.

Amenábar therefore creates a film that despite his definition of it as an ‘urban and youth thriller’ (Sempere, 2000: 78), also has features related to horror films such as the slasher films (Buckley, 2002: 8). Although according to Susan Hayward the thriller is a very difficult genre to categorise, as there are so many subgenres, she affirms that thrillers are films of ‘suspense’ and that ‘a thriller relies on intricacy of plot to create fear and apprehension in the audience’ (2000: 440). This is something which has been probably inherited from the master of the thriller Alfred Hitchcock, a director who has also influenced Amenábar as he freely admits.

Hayward also points out that ‘the psychological thriller bases its construction in sadomasochism, madness and voyeurism. The killer spies on and ensnares his victim in a series of intricate and sadistic moves, waiting to strike. The killer is often most often psychotic and his madness is an explanation for what motivates his actions’ (2000: 441). This voyeurism is related to the widely studied concept of the gaze in cinema, and Hayward gives the example of protagonist Norman Bates in Hitchcock’s *Psycho*, whose protagonist becomes ‘the voyeuristic gaze of mainstream cinema looking through numerous holes (peeping Tom) at the woman’s body’ (2000: 119). The gaze will indeed play an important role in the films analysed in this chapter as will be demonstrated later in

the study. In addition, following Carol Clover's feminist approach to this genre (1992), Ángela represents the figure of the 'final girl' who 'is not sexually active, but rather active in her gaze whereby she seeks out and tracks down the Killer' (Buckley, 2002: 8). What is clear is that the perspective of Ángela is the dominant one in this film and she becomes the objective of the psychopath, something that will be particularly shown by violence in the very end of the film, as will be analysed later in this section.

The poster of the film, part of the narrative image of *Tesis*, also shows Ángela as the victim of the psychopath when she is taped by Bosco at the very end of the film. Some of the subtitles of the poster reinforce this victimisation as the following sentence appears: 'My name is Ángela and I am going to be killed'. Amenábar admitted that he did not like the original poster of the film, and that he decided to change it for the new DVD edition (DVD extras). In this second edition, one of Ángela's eyes is shown whilst she is trying to watch one of the snuff videos, thus representing the ambiguity of the film, as most spectators are ready to watch a violent act and others tend to avoid it. This is also very well expressed in the initial sequence when Ángela is on a train and the passengers are told that they need to get off as someone has thrown himself onto the tracks. When Ángela and the passengers are on the platform, Amenábar reflects on the innate curiosity of human beings as they try to see the victim. Despite the comment of the guard saying: 'Come on, move on, don't be so morbid' and 'Don't look' Ángela's curiosity is shown as she decides to see the victim on the rail tracks and approaches the scene. These two different worlds (those wanting to

see versus those who do not want to) are also portrayed by means of the juxtaposition of slow motion images with naturalistic, real-time images, which also reinforces the fact that this is a scene which is out of the everyday. As film scholar Martin Rubin points out, ‘the creation of a successfully thrilling atmosphere depends upon lifting us out of the quotidian world and transporting us ‘to a heightened state of suspension – between the mundane and the marvellous’ (1999: 268). Moreover, the director also transmits suspense as the spectator adopts Ángela’s point of view and when we also expect to see the victim, in the end, a guard pushes Ángela away and the victim is not shown.

Hence, Amenábar in this sequence reflects on the issue of how audience is attracted to violence, and he points out that

my generation is familiar with violence as it normally surrounds us. But I just wanted to treat the violent images in a different way without showing them; I just wanted to suggest them through the use of sound and music. I was more interested in the face of the characters watching the films rather than the extreme violence in those scenes. The spectators see the characters consuming images in a pathological way...horror is always psychological; it does not make sense to recreate a snuff sequence. (Amenábar in Caparrós Lera, 1999: 76-77)

This is precisely the convention that he uses throughout the film and in other films like *The Others*, in which the psychological and the suggestion of a violent act is shown to be more effective for the spectator than actually showing violent acts. Later in the film, for example, Ángela decides to watch the extremely violent film that she has found in the auditorium in which she found Prof. Figueroa dead. Facing a black screen, both Ángela and we, the spectators, hear only the desperate screams of a woman being beaten, and a mid-shot of Ángela progressively

changes into a close-up of Ángela's face showing the effect of this shocking suggested scene in her face. Hence, the off-screen sound of the victim's screaming and the absence of images increase the tension in the spectator, and, despite not showing explicit violence, the effect that the screaming has on the spectator is considerable since the explicit violence is represented by what is heard and not by what is seen. Amenábar himself points out that this is a much more effective convention and that he was inspired by violent films such as *Funny Games* (Michael Haneke, 1997) in which violent acts are not explicitly shown. However, he admits that whilst Haneke's films create discomfort in the spectator, in his own films he seeks to entertain (DVD audio commentary).

This convention of exploiting the gap between what is seen and what is not seen is closely related to the concept of voyeurism. Film scholar Jason E. Klodt argues that *Tesis* 'uses the voyeurism inherent in the act of watching film to problematise the spectator's gaze' (2007: 3). He then points out that the protagonists of the film display a false distance towards violent imagery, and the protagonists' gazes are disloyal to their obsessions. With this, the film arouses the curiosity of the audience, and therefore the audience consumes violent images (2007: 3) which seems to contradict the intention of the director in criticising the portrayal of violence in media.

Amenábar does not portray characters with a profound and deep psychology, and a very good example of this is Bosco, the psychopath in the film. Characters are portrayed as mere devices for the narrative rather than to stimulate reflection on the character's personality, a feature which is typical of the genre of

the film. In contrast to *Las horas del día*, as will be analysed later in this chapter, Amenábar does not portray the psychopath in a realistic way, nor does he focus on the character's everyday actions.

Amenábar also admits that he is not able to investigate Bosco's psychology: 'the approach was very simple, and it is clear that in this film there is a psychopath, I don't like it when in psychopath films there is normally an explanation for the reasons why the character kills. Here, the bad guy is a really bad person, unscrupulous, I do not dare take the assassin's point of view' (DVD audio commentary). If, as Amenábar says, he does not want to investigate a psychopathic personality, how is Bosco portrayed in this film?

With regard to Bosco's relationships, for example, the spectator does not know much about the relationship between Bosco and his family since there is no direct reference to this in the film. Film scholar Guilfoyle points out that

'closely related to an examination of the killer's identity is an exploration of his family history. As a consequence of a desire for rational motivation and a predisposition to use social scientific theory to explain individual identity, the killer's identity is represented as resulting from his familial relationships and the conditions of his upbringing' and 'a focus on the killer's family history functions to provide further separation between the individual killer and society at large' (2003: 18-19).

Nevertheless, in this film, the absence of reference to family history might exclusively reinforce the fact that Bosco kills for the pleasure of killing as well as for economic reasons, since 'snuff' films are also made to be sold.

With regard to Bosco's social status, he comes from a wealthy family. His house is very luxurious, something which will contrast with the house of *Plenilunio*'s lower class psychopath. Therefore, across these two films, it would

seem that the mise-en-scène tries to establish that there is not necessarily a close relationship between violence and social class. However, in some sociological and media studies it is demonstrated that people living in poor neighbourhoods are more likely to be at risk of being influenced by violence (Potter, 2003: 61). Amenábar seems to have in mind Hollywood models in which films are normally set in a wealthy world, and he distances the film and what happens in it from reality, just as American films normally do. However, as will be analysed later in this chapter, Uribe and Rosales portray a social context which is more recognizable to us.

One of the chameleon-like characteristics of real psychopaths mentioned by Vicente Garrido is that they can go unnoticed and are often charming (2003: 12). In *Tesis*, Bosco seems to behave remarkably normally towards other characters, even showing a kind of charm and an ability to put them at ease. This can be exemplified in the sequence in which he stays at Ángela's parents' house and has dinner with them. There seems to be no sign of violence, but he uses flirtatious language to make himself attractive to Ángela's sister. In fact, later in the film, he seems to be successful in this, as they end up going out together, and Ángela realises that her sister may be in danger.

One of the most explicit scenes of violence in the film occurs towards the end when Ángela goes to Bosco's house. Amenábar uses several clichés for the mise-en-scène taken from horror films (rain, thunderstorm, lights off) as well as narrative twists, and at a certain point the twists and turns in the narrative even seem to point to her co-investigator Chema being the psychopath. However, when

Chema says to Ángela: ‘the garage’, she goes there and finds out that it is where all the previous women were murdered. This time Ángela will have to face an extremely violent situation: she is now about to become the protagonist of a snuff film. Bosco is cold-blooded and shows no sign of emotion, as is demonstrated by his own words:

First I’m going to punch you in the head until you lose consciousness, I’ll wait till you come round. . . Then I’m going to cut off your arms and legs...if I cut off your hand I can put it on your head like a crown, I can make you eat your own ear. If I feel like it, I can even rip out your guts without killing you. Frightening, isn’t it?

These words anticipate what the spectator is going to see, which also increases the tension, again without any violent acts being seen. In a meta-cinematic scene, blueish images seen through the lens of the video camera are juxtaposed with colour images to distinguish the two different worlds, the world of the psychopath who makes snuff films and in which he becomes the main protagonist, and the world in which Ángela is the victim of Bosco’s actions. However, with a close-up of Ángela’s hand, the audience is made aware that she has a knife which will presumably enable her to escape from this violent situation.

The spectacle of graphic violence is ready to start when Bosco switches the lights off and Ángela is in the spotlight. The use of the lights in *mise-en-scène* here emphasises the defenceless situation of Ángela versus the giant shadow of the psychopath that we can see on the wall behind her. The spectator then sees through the video camera lens that Bosco is approaching Ángela and simultaneously the louder music increases the tension and suspense (Potter, 2003: 128). The scene changes into colour whilst Ángela confronts Bosco using her

knife, then she is able to reach Bosco's gun to kill him. While she is threatening to do so, he keeps coming closer to her, and in a close-up the spectator sees the two different worlds where now Ángela who was 'the victim becomes the victimiser' (Buckley, 2002: 20). However, this analysis can be questioned, as Ángela is defending herself from a horrible death. In this scene, Amenábar again uses slow camera motion in order to emphasise this kind of non-quotidian and almost dream-like situation when she fires the gun at Bosco's head. The director shows this violent action subtly since the spectators sees the shot through the blueish tone of the camera lens, and the use of a long shot.

After this climactic scene, the presenter of a TV programme entitled *Justice and Law* introduces the story of the 'snuff girls' and warns the spectator of the violent images which are going to be shown. Whilst the story is being broadcast on TV, Ángela visits the ward in which Chema is hospitalised. This scene suggests that everyone in the hospital is hypnotised by the violent images they are going to see, although again Amenábar will not actually show any of them.

In referring to this scene, the director admits that this is not the typical happy ending which traditionally re-establishes the initial equilibrium in a thriller, but in fact, he points out that his intention is to parody what it was possible to see in some American programmes, as at the time these reality show programmes were not yet shown on Spanish television.<sup>25</sup> Therefore, the initial reflection on the issue of violence at the very beginning of the film is again portrayed at the very

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<sup>25</sup> In retrospect, Amenábar's focus on the dangers of the reality-based genre was vindicated, given the dominance of this genre in Spanish media – as in many other national media outlets – from the 1990s onwards.

end with what Amenábar calls ‘a bitter-sweet ending’ (DVD extras). With this circularity Amenábar emphasises the fact that although *Tesis* is mainly an entertainment, whose representations of violence are shaped by the generic and various stylistic devices that he uses throughout the film, it is also possible to introduce a more subtle, and perhaps gentle criticism of such social issues such as the representation of violence in the media.

After having looked at *Tesis*, a Spanish thriller which nevertheless contains many typical American conventions, let us now examine the second film of this chapter: *Plenilunio*. The director, Imanol Uribe, has directed several violent films, among them *La muerte de Mikel* (1984) and *Días contados* (1994), which were box office hits when they were released. However, one of the most controversial films in the history of Spanish cinema was his documentary entitled *El proceso de Burgos* which tells of the consequences of ETA (Basque Terrorist Group) killing a police captain in 1968. The members of ETA were given death sentences; however, due to the international pressure on the government, these were commuted to life imprisonment. According to film scholar Rob Stone the film had significant problems on its release in the San Sebastian Film Festival. The authorities attempted to ban it and the film even jeopardised the declaration of autonomy for the Basque Country in 1979 (2002: 138). With films such as *Días contados*, Uribe portrays the existing problems in the Basque Country without focusing explicitly on the political problems from this region in Spain, but rather he subtly deals with political issues through stories parallel to the main narrative in a different combination of elements from the thriller genre (Stone, 2002: 151).

It is precisely this that happens in the story of *Plenilunio*, based on the eponymous novel by Antonio Muñoz Molina. In Uribe's words, it is 'a reflection on horror and love, which sometimes co-exist so close to one another' (Monterde, 2000: 17). This film tells the story of a policeman who has been working for fourteen years in Bilbao coping with the threatening atmosphere created by the presence of the Basque Terrorist Group, ETA. When the policeman, Manuel (Miguel Angel Solá), moves to another region of Spain in order to find a more peaceful place, he then has to face a psychopath (Juan Diego Botto) who kills a little girl and commits his crimes, as the title of the film suggests, at full moon, as if he was a kind of vampire. Parallel to this story, the policeman falls in love with the teacher of the little girl, Susana Grey (Adriana Ozores). It is where the protagonists have to confront both the past and the present. The characters tell us about their lives, and the wishes they can never fulfil (Carmona, 2004: 109). In addition to these two stories, another aggressor, this time someone that the spectators presume to be a member of ETA, keeps watching the policeman, and at the very end of the film tries to kill him, though without success.

Whilst in *Tesis* the role of the gaze was significant (Klodt, 2007), the poster for *Plenilunio* also introduces the significant role of 'looking' since an extreme close-up of the psychopath's eyes appears in the middle of a black frame (Juan Diego Botto). At the top of the poster the words anticipate the violent atmosphere of the film and its genre: 'Look for his eyes, for in his eyes will his crimes be found', and indeed, the spectator will witness these crimes through the eyes of the aggressor. In addition, while the poster of *Tesis* presented the

perspective of the victim, in contrast here the poster introduces the figure of the alleged murderer, therefore, with an internal perspective different from the external perspective in *Tesis*. However, in *Plenilunio*, the internal perspective is also juxtaposed to the external perspective with the parallel love story of the policeman and the teacher. With this juxtaposition of two completely different worlds, the director provides the spectator with a certain relief from the violent actions and thoughts of the aggressor, therefore, providing an additional distance to the otherness of the figure of the psychopath.

The psychopath is initially introduced in various scenes in which he has a cold and hostile relationship with his parents suggestive of the kind of hostility which has already been signalled to be a common characteristic of the lives of psychopaths (Garrido Lora, 2004: 79). In the *mise-en-scène* of the film, the house is divided into two contrasting worlds. One half of this is the protagonist's bedroom, the place in which he unmask his repressed feelings and which only the spectator sees. Once he goes into his room he locks the door. Whenever he does so, his mother comments 'it looks like you are hiding from us', and to which he replies to himself: 'There is never silence in this house, fuck. There is no way of being safe. I spend the whole day working and I cannot watch a video or have a drink...they are always spying behind the door'. The bedroom door becomes a significant element of the *mise-en-scène* since it clearly separates these two very different worlds: his own world whose primary element is violence, and that of his parents. This contrast becomes reinforced by the juxtaposition of different shots from inside and outside the door. Hence, the editing of these juxtaposed shots

shapes those different worlds. It is significant that the psychopath remains nameless, a lack of identity which reflects the lack of human contact in his life.

In addition, when the murderer goes out into the streets and he comes across some neighbours at the entrance door, the spectator sees him greet and act normally towards his neighbours, also with a voice of a completely different pitch to the one he uses in his bedroom or when he assassinates his victims. This kind of disguised behaviour is used when he is in the streets and in the fish market, where he works. However, juxtaposed to that kindness towards his neighbours, he also becomes hostile towards some of his clients, though it is only the spectator who is made aware of that hostility. Similarly, the dialogue between the psychopath and his father is very superficial since he is not able to have a serious conversation, especially if any of these conversations leads him to think about his violent acts.

The psychopath in *Plenilunio* has no partner and, therefore, the spectator is not aware of how he would act in this context. However, the audience sees that his behaviour is very violent and controlling over people, especially when he talks to women. Very different is the case of Bosco in *Tesis* who has a partner and whose victims are all his partners.

With regard to the use of language, psychopaths often have a great command of verbal communication (Garrido Lora, 2004: 79), and in *Plenilunio*, the murderer is clearly represented as a character with a great command of language despite his apparent shyness. One of the scenes that best exemplifies this is the last one of the film in which the inspector and the assassin are talking about

the latter's crimes. His command of language becomes a weapon which explains his violent acts that, according to him, are made by some malign, external force which he simply refers to as 'evil', and not by him. Another good example of his good command of language is also found through the diegetic sound when he changes his voice. As already mentioned, he uses a completely different voice when he speaks to people than when he talks to himself. He changes from a normally pitched voice to a very aggressive tone using a kind of language which anticipates the violence that he is going to use in his acts. Therefore, the director uses this change of pitch as a metaphorical and artistic device to emphasise the chameleon-like characteristics of the psychopath, which is also indicative of split personality.

The search for power is a noticeable feature in the psychopaths' personalities in these three films and power is intrinsically related to violence. That thirst for power over their victims is an essential motive for their crimes (Garrido Lora, 2004: 80). For instance, in *Plenilunio*, there is a scene in which the psychopath abuses a young girl. Again this power is emphasised with elements of the *mise-en-scène* such as the piece of cloth that he uses to be sure that the girl is suffocated.

Another of the most important features of the psychopath's personality is egocentricity, as he is only able to see what affects himself. He is unable to empathise with other people (Garrido Lora, 2004: 80). In *Plenilunio*, the rest of the world does not exist for the psychopath, he does not worry about his parents,

and he does not have any friends or any kind of social relationships apart from with the people he knows at work.

Another interesting feature of this film is the casting of established Argentinian/Spanish actor Juan Diego Botto in the lead actor role as the psychopathic killer, rather than an actor whose external appearance could indicate moral and social ugliness.<sup>26</sup> Film scholar Barry K. Grant refers to the famous psychopath in *American Psycho* and he points out that nowadays ‘the evil of yuppie monsters, unlike the monsters of classic horror films, is not expressed through horrifying appearance, but rather, by just the opposite’ (1999: 26). Moreover, film scholar Nicole Rafter argues that spectators can also ‘enjoy identifying with such protagonists [referring to psycho-killers] and with the attractive stars who portray them’ (Rafter, 2006: 13). In this case, Spanish directors such as Uribe have made casting decisions based on notions of audience attraction to certain actors or stars, within the limited star system of the Spanish entertainment industry. It could be argued that the inclusion of popular, good-looking actors such as, Botto, or Eduardo Noriega was vital for success, in films made to appeal to a much wider audience.

As film scholar Chris Perriam argues in his book *Stars and Masculinities in Spanish Cinema* in the late 1990s a newer generation of actors started to appear, and among the examples he cites are the protagonists of both *Plenilunio* and *Tesis*. He discusses Juan Diego Botto, whose ‘intensely studied acting style, his playing of problem men, and his deep brown eyes, all give him a strong

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<sup>26</sup> The murderers in *El día de la bestia* or characters in films like *Torrente*, however, are more in keeping with earlier, more caricatured portrayals of evil characters.

following among female audiences and magazine buyers' (2003: 188). In discussing *Plenilunio*, Perriam also affirms that Botto's eyes 'habitually signal innocence, openness, vulnerability, and safe sexiness and their melodramatic conversion sends a satisfying thrill through the audience for this film (2003: 190). Similarly, and relevant to the casting of *Tesis*, Eduardo Noriega brings in his early roles 'a preppy, safe-looking sexiness, a rich-kid aura' (2003: 175).

Whilst the presence of good-looking actors who might attract a certain audience seems to be no coincidence, is it an accident that the use of humour is hardly present in the films analysed in this chapter? Serial killers in Spanish cinema such as the ones in *El día de la bestia* and *Justino, un asesino de la tercera edad* are represented in humour and parody, and the effect of this is a camouflage, as the public see humour as a kind of device to remove the threat of violence (Potter, 2003: 93). In contrast, in all three cases here, violence is presented as serious and no irony or humour seems to be present in the violent acts, which indicates that the representations of violence are made more realistic.

With regard to realistic depiction of psychopaths and violence, it is also interesting to note what the policeman thinks about the serial killers. In this case, the director seems to express a kind of metafilmic thought as he says: 'I had imagined that serial killers anticipate everything but they also make mistakes'. The policeman answers: 'In films, killing someone is something very easy and it does not have any worth. What disgusts me in cinema is the fact that it makes the crime more attractive when it is only cruelty and crap'. Clearly, the director is criticising the spectacular narratives and graphic portrayal of the crimes and

violence presented in the typical crime films either in American or Spanish cinema (King, 2005: 10), spectacular images which are not present either in *Plenilunio* or in *Las horas del día*.

All these representations of violence are also emphasised with other cinematic devices such as the position and movement of the camera in several scenes of *Plenilunio*. In the crime scenes there is an increase in the number of the shots when the violent acts are committed. A good example is the sequence in which the serial killer in *Plenilunio* threatens his victim after they get off the lift and he abuses her. Later in the film, when he goes to the riverside, the director uses a travelling shot which emphasises that distressing journey towards the river by encouraging the spectator to anticipate that something bad will certainly happen to the girl. Uribe points out that he wanted to avoid any kind of ‘morbid pleasure’ in the scene in which the serial killer tries to kill his victim. He, therefore, subtly uses ellipsis in order to prolong the suspense, making the audience form their own hypothesis about what will happen next (Bordwell, 1985: 37). In addition, Uribe points out that he decided to use long shots when the girl wakes up and runs away in order to avoid this kind of ‘morbid pleasure’ (DVD extras). Hence, the fact that the director directly refers to avoiding ‘morbid pleasure’ is a clear distinction between his own practice and the use of spectacular violence in Hollywood, which reflects the fact that some directors feel a moral responsibility not to glamorise violence.

One of the final scenes in the film exemplifies this non-spectacular portrayal of violence. After Adriana decides to go back to Madrid, Manuel goes to

say goodbye to her and she asks him not to see her again until he has sorted his life out, as he has a wife who is now back home after recovering from the pressure of living in the Basque Country under continuous threats. Whilst Manuel is walking along the street, the spectator sees in a medium long shot how the Basque terrorist member pulls his gun out, and despite Adriana's warning Manuel from the window, when he turns round, Manuel is shot by this anonymous terrorist. This violent sequence is not portrayed in a spectacular way, and the director does not use suspense music, but he uses a romantic song entitled *Fly me to the moon* by Anita O'Day, a song which seems to belong to the previous romantic scene rather than the assassination sequence. With the use of this music, the director wants to mitigate the violent act rather than create the very dramatic effect that, for example, suspense music would have had instead. In addition, with this romantic song, he again insists on his idea of how closely horror and love co-exist.

The director also uses slow camera motion for a few seconds to emphasise suspense in a scene where ETA terrorism, which is only shown here as contextual, is parallel to another more everyday type of terrorism, in other words, the more common world of murderers in our society. It seems also interesting that after he has been shot, a pitch black screen is shown and we only hear Manuel saying 'I'm not dead, I'm not dead', and just after this, the spectator only sees a close-up of Susana's face crying. Hence, the director does not graphically show the consequences of the violent act.

Finally, in the epilogue sequence, Manuel goes to visit the psychopath who is now in prison, and in contrast to a previous scene in which the psychopath was crying and seemed to regret what he had done, this time he shows no remorse. He admits that everything that he had said was a lie, he wanted to kill the little girls, however, he says that it was an evil force which led him to kill the children. The police inspector says: ‘in your thirties you will be out again and you will do the same again, as long as your God does not want somebody to kill you earlier’. This sentence makes a reference to the fact the policeman also has almost been killed by an ETA Basque terrorist, a member of a group of murderers who come out of prison and in some cases return to committing acts of violence. A criticism of the way institutions deal with these murderers, and not just serial killers, may also be conferred from the policeman’s remark. Manuel then leaves the room and whilst we see the aggressor screaming, framed in a white background, the image is dissolved to the white image of the moon as if this eye-like satellite is witnessing these violent acts as well as watching the loneliness of people and the daily routine of life.

The next film which will be analysed, *Las horas del día*, also reflects the solitude of the main characters, including the aggressor, and portrays violence as part of quotidian life with the use of cinematic techniques and conventions very different from the other two films analysed, as will be demonstrated later in this chapter. This section aims to establish to what extent violence and realist techniques can be combined in order to create a very different portrayal from that of the American serial killer, in terms of representations of violence. Hence, I

will question whether the character of the psychopath and its representation of violence in the specific context of Spanish cinema varies in comparison to the most common and recent portraits of psychopaths in American and Spanish cinemas. Jaime Rosales' critically acclaimed film *Las horas del día* (*The Hours of the Day*) has been chosen as the primary material for this analysis.

In contrast to the commercial cinema defended by Amenábar, Jaime Rosales is a director who openly supports 'quality cinema'. In his own words:

When I started to think of making the film, I just wanted to tell a different story...I wanted to tell the story without giving the reason why Abel (the psychopath) kills...in fact, this film cannot be included in any kind of genre since it is not a thriller or a melodrama... I defend an auteur cinema and a cinema influenced by our culture but it seems that the authorities are not interested in this (DVD extras).

The director himself admits that 'the stylistic choices were based on principles of austerity, realism and distancing' (DVD extras), and that those principles were specified with the use of cinematic language. In addition, he also admits influences from directors such as Bresson, Rossellini, Pasolini, and Godard, which clearly reflect a close relation to realism in its different cinematic forms (DVD extras). It is my contention that those 'realistic' principles and conventions will also influence the representations of violence in this film. The complex concept of realism has raised numerous academic debates throughout various decades. The fact that in Europe so many 'realist' trends have existed demonstrates it is not by chance that European cinema has made realism one of its major traditions, a tradition which invites us to reflect upon the problems that appear in our society by means of formal cinematic conventions.

However, *Las horas del día* is not presented either as ‘a social problem melodrama’ nor as a thriller. Consequently, *Las horas del día* focuses on cinematography and style rather than narrative or generic features. Jaime Rosales, therefore, has created a film which can be considered experimental from a cinematic point of view. This is probably why the film has only been seen by a limited audience in comparison with the other two films analysed in this chapter<sup>27</sup>. In his latest films, Rosales has also continued to experiment with various cinematic conventions such as the creative use of split screen and a static camera as in *La soledad (Solitary Fragments)* (2007), a film that won three 2008 Goya awards including best picture. It is also worth mentioning his latest film which has been released in 2009 at the San Sebastian Film Festival. Entitled *Tiro en la cabeza* (2008), it tells the story of the daily life of an ETA terrorist who suddenly starts killing people as part of his everyday practice. In this film, Rosales experiments with the use of cinematic conventions such as the use of zoom lens, long shots and dialogue which is not heard by the spectator.

The film which will be studied here, *Las horas del día*, tells the story of a young man, Abel (Alex Brendemühl) who lives in a working-class town near Barcelona, apparently leading a normal life with his family and his girlfriend. Nevertheless, Abel starts killing people without any apparent explanation, yet he is not described as a sadistic serial killer, but as a normal person who also happens to commit acts of brutal violence. The poster of the film does not show any evident violence either, and with its close-up of the protagonist’s face, it

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<sup>27</sup> According to Ministry of Culture film database the film was seen by only 38.858 spectators.

emphasises the fact that this is a story about an apparently normal person who seems to have two faces represented by the two semi-circles which resemble a fragmented brain. In addition, he is also depicted as having various fragmented mouths. All this suggests two profoundly differentiated worlds in his mind, one perfectly ordinary, the other extremely violent.

Abel, who despite his name, is rather, a Cain-like figure, lives with his mother and there does not seem to be any kind of conflict between them. Although they hold banal conversations, there does not seem to be any kind of conflict which could affect Abel's behaviour. Everything seems to be normal. The director focuses on his daily routine without searching for any kind of explanation for his violent behaviour (DVD extras).

The first scenes reflect the daily routine of the murderer and the other characters who live in this working-class city in Catalonia: El Prat de Llobregat in the Barcelona area. The film starts with an establishing shot in which we see a long shot of different parts of the city apparently tranquil. The spectator hears the typical urban noises of cranes and cars. The director progressively brings the shots closer to the block of flats where Abel lives. Rosales abruptly introduces Abel in a scene in which he is shaving and looking at himself in the mirror. What strikes the spectator here is the length of the shot. According to the director, this sequence is one of the most important sequences in the film as it suggests what kind of film the spectator is going to see: a film with a completely different perspective. This refers to the fact this is not the typical serial killer film, but rather an auteur's view of the topic (DVD extras). This sequence also transmits a certain suspense as the

spectator starts asking himself/herself what the film is about, as nothing is happening, and Abel's eyes reflect a mysterious look which hides a horrible personality that still needs to be discovered. Furthermore, the mirror also reflects Abel's double personality, two completely different sides, one of them filled with violence.

The following sequence, in which Abel is having breakfast with his mother, also emphasises this daily routine of the character and the slow pace of the film. The first shot is subtly filmed with a frame-within-frame shot, a technique which is used with consistency throughout the film and which goes against the typical conventions of the way characters are normally introduced in Hollywood films. Then, the camera approaches the characters and again, nothing seems to be happening, just a banal conversation which helps to maintain the tension over what is going to happen next, as the story line becomes more unpredictable and no clues are given to the spectator.

With regard to the aggressor's personality (Garrido Lora, 2004: 79) Abel is clearly portrayed as selfish and narcissistic like the psychopaths in *Tesis* and *Plenilunio*. For instance, in the scene in which he tries to convince his shop assistant to leave her job for a derisory pay-off, he accuses her of being selfish, when in fact he is the one who is being selfish since he offers her a pittance in compensation for being made redundant. Another example occurs on his friend's wedding day when Abel tells him a story that implies the bride is willing to cheat on her husband. He does not care about his friend's reaction, and shows no empathy towards him.

Although Rosales presents a psychopath with a characteristic common to psychopaths in other films, the violent scenes in which Abel is involved are portrayed in a different way? I will now focus on the director's stylistic choices in the only two violent sequences in the film: the first in which the protagonist kills a taxi driver, and the second where he kills an old man in the toilet at the underground station. In short, his victims are randomly chosen. Film critic Tom Dawson refers to these two scenes saying:

What proves so disconcerting is that the killing of strangers (of which there are two instances) is treated in exactly the same matter-of-fact tone as a quiet drink at a bar, or a discussion with an employee over severance pay, or the viewing with a partner of a flat. Moreover the positioning of the first murder around the half-hour mark generates a degree of tension: Abel seems to make no substantial effort to cover his tracks and every individual he encounters thereafter appears to be a potential victim (2004).

There is certainly an effect of suspense, but a suspense that completely differs from *Tesis*, for example, in which tension and suspense were probably the director's main objectives. Here, in contrast, Rosales focuses on presenting to us Abel's daily routine and uses completely different cinematic techniques for this purpose. I will focus now on the first sequence in order to exemplify some of the points raised so far in this section.

The sequence starts with Abel in a taxi being driven along a motorway. Suddenly, Abel tells the driver to go into an isolated area in the middle of nowhere, which according to the director represents a kind of 'no man's land' and provokes certain tension for the spectator. However, this kind of setting and landscape has become familiar for Spanish audiences as it represents a common portrayal of Mediterranean landscapes. This combination of isolation and familiar

landscape consolidates the ordinary, and so prepares the spectator to become a witness of a violent act. The spectator can hardly see the aggressor until the moment in which he starts killing his victim. At this point the psychopath abruptly moves into the centre of the frame and begins clumsily trying to strangle his victim. This is something which takes him several attempts. The spectator becomes the witness of this criminal act from a third person point of view, which emphasises the objectivity and realism that the director is pursuing. Only diegetic sound is used in this sequence and indeed throughout the film, which again indicates that the director uses this technique to evoke verisimilitude. The screams and sounds of exasperation and desperation of the victims create a tension in the audience. On the other hand, the different noises that the aggressor makes such as the continuous punching or when he uses a stone to finish off the victim emphasise his violent acts in spite of the lack of conventional spectacular effects. Verisimilitude is further emphasised by the improvisation of the actor, something that the director claims was a constant feature of the acting process throughout the film. The director wanted Alex Brendemühl to work on the character's personality, and Rosales preferred to work on the pace of the sequences and the film. The director also admits that actress Pape Monsoriu, Trini in the film, the assistant in Abel's shop, was a very spontaneous person and the more she was constrained by the script, the more uncomfortable she would feel (DVD audio commentary). The fact that the director preferred to give the actors freedom to improvise in most of the scenes would give a more realistic effect in the final outcome.

It is significant that barely any blood is seen throughout this film, which contrasts with other US mainstream films, in which the use of make-up emphasises graphic violence in a spectacular and stylised way. In fact, according to Rosales this caused a dispute with his special effects professional, who wanted to portray violence in a spectacular way, which conflicted with the objectivity and distance that Rosales was aiming for (DVD extras). In the sequence where his victim is being killed in the taxi, what is also very significant in the *mise-en-scène* is the fact that the spectator does not see the victim whilst she is being beaten (only when he tries to strangle her). He clumsily tries to kill her, not with typical props such as are used in psycho thrillers, but with his hands and a stone that he picks up in order to finally finish her off.

In terms of cinematography, close shots are not used in this sequence, nor anywhere in the film. This is also a cinematic technique which serves to emphasise the sense of objectivity that the director aims for, and again is also related to his intention of portraying what is happening in a realistic way. This objectivity is reinforced by the total absence of subjective point of view shots in this sequence, leaving the spectator with neither the victim's nor the aggressor's point of view.

Similarly at the start of this sequence, a camera car is used in order to film the scene in which they are driving on the motorway. The use of a camera car enables the director to reinforce the kind of objectivity that gives a third person perspective. Rosales claims that the main reason why he preferred not to shoot from inside the car was for safety reasons. But, in addition, he comments that a

perspective from inside the car would not present a real or objective point of view either, although it may be argued that whether inside or outside the car, the point of view will not be real or objective (DVD extras).

In close relation to this objective point of view, later in this sequence, when the murder is committed, a camera on a tripod is used with long shots and slow panning to the right and the left of the place of murder. According to the director, the use of a tripod is limited to the murder scenes, which accentuates this objective point of view (DVD extras). Conversely, most of the remainder of the film uses hand-held camera.

All these cinematic devices, which are crucial elements of the representation of violence, also emphasise a kind of distance or gap between the spectator and the characters of this film. This distance is also highlighted in the personality of the psychopath since he is portrayed as a very distant person with regard to the relationship with his girlfriend. In *Las horas del día*, the aggressor is not portrayed as dominant or jealous, one of the characteristics mentioned by Garrido Lora as typical of psychopaths (2004: 80). Instead, he seems to be very submissive to his girlfriend and he does not show any kind of jealousy either. She is portrayed as the one who controls him and decides what they have to do. For instance, in the scene in which they are having a drink in a bar, she is the one who suggests what to do that afternoon whilst Abel remains indifferent. Nonetheless, he certainly loves feeling power over people, especially over his victims.

The spectator cannot accurately read his reactions after the crime as his face does not seem to change and he does not seem to have any kind of reaction

(remorse or happiness) after committing these violent murders. It is significant how the actor subtly uses facial expression to portray himself as psychologically contained and indifferent as part of the *mise-en-scène*. It is no coincidence that all the actors chosen for this film, including the main protagonist, were unknown in Spain, something that, as Rosales points out, adds a certain effect of objectivity and distancing (DVD extras).

In contrast to the common portrayal of serial killers in either American or Spanish mainstream films such as *Tesis*, Jaime Rosales does not produce a genre film but he reshapes violence and reconstructs the psychopath with a combination of stylistic features such as *mise-en-scène*, sound and cinematic techniques which are directly taken from realistic conventions. Moreover, he does not seem to seek the social or psychological reasons why the psychopath commits his crimes, but rather focuses on the daily routine of a psychopath who seems to be closer to all of us. Hence, he does not make a social film trying to denounce a social problem.

In this film, violence is based on realistic conventions and auteurist choices, which represent the kind of cinema that the director is arguing for: namely, quality cinema. It is worth mentioning that when Rosales defends quality cinema, he raises questions about the current state of Spanish cinema. He mentions that it will always be in crisis, since Spanish productions cannot compete with American cinema (DVD extras). In addition, if they try to imitate Hollywood, the quality of the films will be poor, as the budget is quite limited. Therefore, he embraces auteur cinema or what he names 'a cultural cinema' which is uniquely European, a type that American cinema cannot compete with. Rosales, therefore, would

disagree with Amenábar's position that favours commercial films which have both European and American influences.

In conclusion, in these three films we encounter three different portrayals of psychopaths in terms of characterisation and violence. Despite having common features with regard to characterisation, the psychopaths in *Plenilunio*, *Tesis* and *Las horas del día* differ because of choices made by the directors. In *Tesis*, Bosco represents a psychopath who commits his acts of violence to produce 'snuff movies' and whose motivation is pecuniary. Furthermore, Amenábar produces a genre film with all the commercial elements that an American film may have and in which dialogue does not seem to have any kind of relevance. However, the director goes beyond the common characteristics of the thriller when he introduces features which are not commonly found in American films. In terms of narrative, the last sequence of this film does not follow Todorov's rules of reestablishment of normality (Buckland, 2003: 36-7), as Amenábar subtly introduces a scene in which he questions the use of violence in mass media in our current society by letting the spectator see how people in a hospital seem to be amazed by violent images, which, as has been demonstrated in several studies, may attract the spectator's attention and may also have effects on the viewer (Jordan, 2008: 189).

In *Plenilunio* the director also uses stylistic devices of the thriller genre, but includes a political message by juxtaposing political violence with the 'unexplainable' violence of the psychopath. Parallel to the character of the psychopath, Uribe subtly introduces a new aggressor at the end of the film, a

member of the Basque terrorist group ETA, who tries to assassinate the policeman. It seems interesting that the film's most dangerous character as far as the policeman is concerned does not become his main threat, but in fact, an anonymous psychopath who represents the Basque terrorist group. It is this murderer who finally becomes the main aggressor in terms of the consequences for the policeman. The director clearly uses local references and the social problems of his region, the Basque country, in order to construct a social critique of the region's political situation. This juxtaposition of political violence and the violence of the main protagonist creates a subtle parallelism which clearly shows how political violence can differ from other kind of 'inexplicable' violence. However, similarly, he seems to establish a parallelism showing that any kind of violence is unreasonable.

Whilst in *Plenilunio* and *Tesis* violence is used as an important element of the narrative and characterisation in terms of the thriller genre and aiming at a wider public, both films also include an element of social critique, of social isolation in *Plenilunio*, and of the potential dangers of excessive media violence in *Tesis*. In contrast, in *Las horas del día*, Jaime Rosales does not produce a genre film but he reshapes violence and reconstructs the psychopath with a combination of stylistic features more in keeping with classic realism. The director does not give such relevance to the narrative in comparison with the other two films analysed in this chapter. Despite these different portrayals, the spectator is not confronted with the hyper-spectacularity of violence which is commonly found in American psycho-thriller films such as *American Psycho*, or the graphic realistic

style that we find in *Henry, Portrait of a Serial Killer*. These features establish a distinction between American cinema and European and Spanish cinema, which certainly demonstrates that Spanish directors are continuously re-examining violence and reintegrating different portrayals of psychopaths.

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## *Chapter Six*

### *Violence in Adolescent Spanish Cinema*

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With the resurgence of genre cinema, which gave rise to popular and commercial films in the 1990s and the beginning of the twenty first century, new films were produced to attract wider audiences (Heredero and Santamarina, 2002: 50-52), especially adolescents who constitute the main group of spectators who engender a kind of multiplex generation (Shary, 2002). Box-office hits, Santiago Segura's *Torrente, el brazo tonto de la ley* (1998), Carlos Gil's *School Killer* (2001), and Jaume Balagueró and Paco Plaza's *[REC]* (2007) are three examples of this kind of cinema which mainly attracts a young audience and have been chosen as the primary material by which my findings will be exemplified.

This chapter will consider the following questions: What is the definition of adolescent cinema in the Spanish context? Is Spanish adolescent cinema incompatible with 'quality' cinema? How do adolescent films present violence? Is violence used for social denouncement or purely for entertainment? What do adolescent audiences demand? Do they demand violence, and specifically more graphic and explicit violence? Do these narratives follow American models of spectacular narratives? What are the stylistic features of these representations? And finally, to what extent are the protagonists and the violence presented to us actually representative of a social and cultural reality?

In order to contextualise this topic, I will begin with a definition of adolescent cinema in American and Spanish films, and continue with a description of the plot of the three films, before providing an analysis of the main characters, paying particular attention to victims and aggressors. In addition, the methodology of analysis encompasses a study of some stylistic features using cinematic tools such as the camerawork, music, *mise-en-scène* or editing. As in earlier chapters, violence will not only be analysed taking into account cultural and social studies on violence but also considering Prince's approach in which the current studies on violence in film should also focus on its stylistic representations. This analysis will follow different genre frameworks and these will be integrated with studies of the context of production and audience research as well as the stylistic features related to these violent representations. Unlike in the previous chapters, the case studies analysed in this chapter are defined by their target consumers rather than by their thematic content, though content should, of course, reflect the interests of any target audiences. Given the defining status of audience demographics for this type of cinema, this chapter will, of necessity, place more emphasis on audience reception. Ultimately, adolescents, like other film-goers, vote with their feet. In the case of one of the films to be studied in this chapter, their overwhelming vote of approval at the box office became a phenomenon that scholars of contemporary Spanish cinema have had to confront.

The definition of genre has in recent years been problematised by academics; some authors define genres as texts which share certain features which are constantly reused in multiple versions (Neale, 2000: 12). Other authors such as

Schatz claim that ‘a genre represents a range of expression for film-makers and a range of experience for viewers’ (Schatz, 1981: 3) and he also argues that ‘any genre film is the original creation of an individual writer or director, but the nature and range of that originality are determined by the conventions and expectations involved in the genre filmmaking process’ (1981: 13). I certainly agree that a film genre is shaped by certain prototypes which are created by a kind of shared knowledge between the industry and the audience. It can be said that genres share communicative purposes which show similar patterns in terms of narrative, structure, and style. Indeed, violence contributes to each of these three elements; it is not only created by the film-makers but is also a feature the spectator expects, and certainly in adolescent films.

A different approach is taken by Timothy Shary; in his book *Generation Multiplex*, he analyses five sub-genres of youth films: youth in school, delinquent youth, youth horror film, youth and science and youth in love and sex. He examines a wide corpus of American youth films and he tries to establish how youngsters have been represented following a genre-based approach and demonstrating that ‘not only do youth films comprise a legitimate genre worthy of study on their own terms, but that they are imbued with a unique cultural significance: they question our evolving identities from youth to adulthood while simultaneously shaping and maintaining those identities’ (Shary, 2002: 11). Shary considers these films part of a genre formed of different sub-genres, but this classification can also be questioned since some of these might be classified otherwise. For example, what he calls youth horror films could also be called teen

films. In the case of Spanish case studies that I will be analyzing in this chapter, the case of *Torrente* is a good example of a film which is difficult to classify as a genre since it has already been classified as a hybrid film shaped by a mixture of genres (Jordan, 2003: 194).

The change from youth to adulthood that Shary mentions also makes teenagers especially vulnerable with regard to their consumption of violence in films and videogames. Additionally, teenagers as a group are amongst the most frequent cinema-goers (Tzioumakis, 2006: 128). Derek Scott's study demonstrates that children and adolescents demand violence in videogames; for example, children between the ages of nine and eleven specify their preference for violent games (Scott, 1995: 121). However, Scott also failed to demonstrate that there was a link between violent videogames and increased aggression among their audiences (Scott, 1995: 130). That does not mean that violence may not have other negative effects on children and adolescents, effects such as desensitisation (Potter, 2003: 33). Despite these different discussions on the effects of violence, what seems clear is that teenagers demand violence in their entertainment, as it might be for them an indirect way to be more aroused (displaying the physiological effects of fear, for example), albeit in a fictional world.

Other books have been published in the last decades on the subject of adolescent American cinema. For instance, in *The Cinema of Adolescence*, David Considine argues that American cinema has failed to portray adolescence in a realistic way (Considine, 1985: 9). In other words, the contexts and the stereotyped characters present in these films have not been characteristic of the

American teenage group as a whole. For example, adolescents are normally portrayed as belonging to a wealthy or middle-class family rather than coming from wider social groupings.

What is the case for Spanish cinema? Are the adolescents portrayed in a stereotypical way or in a more realistic way? My subsequent analysis of, for example, *School Killer*, will show how certain stereotypical features of aggressors and victims taken from the American horror genre are applied to the Spanish context.

However, these adolescent films do not only produce a potential genuine genre, they also shape representations of violence determined by generic conventions, audience demands and expectations, narrative features, and stylistic choices. It is my contention that these representations of violence constitute a major feature for some of the sub-genres such as the adolescent films which will be analysed in this chapter.

In this respect, Wheeler Winston Dixon in his article entitled 'Fighting and Violence and Everything, That's Always Cool: Teen Films in the 1990s' argues that teen films 'offer what they have always offered: action, escape, violence, drama, the simulacrum of personal involvement without actual presence or risk' and that teen films are now more violent and less innocent than earlier teen films (Dixon, 2000: 139). Violence can be considered a key element of adolescent cinema not only in American cinema but also in contemporary Spanish cinema, as I will examine in the next section.

In reference to the subgenre of the youth horror film, Shary points out that 'the most peculiar feature of the 1980s teen horror film was its excess, at least compared to its predecessors, of sex and violence' (2002: 138). The slasher / stalker film has been one of the most common subgenres in youth horror films. Based on a revenge situation, the main characters stalk their victims. According to David Edelstein 'slasher movies are teen sex comedies; the only difference is the presence of an outsider, someone who watches the fun – like a moviegoer – and presumably, becomes enraged by it' (Edelstein, 1984: 57). In addition, he argues that adolescents can enjoy these portrayals as 'comical extremes' which may partially explain the box office success of these films (Edelstein, 1984: 57). Some examples of these films in American cinema are *Halloween* (John Carpenter, 1978), *Friday the 13<sup>th</sup>* (Sean Cunningham, 1980), *A Nightmare on Elm Street* (Wes Craven, 1984) series and *Slumber Party Massacre* (Amy Holden Jones, 1982). Steve Neale argues that the horror film is closely related to the slasher film. He argues that the monster is normally represented by males and that their victims are normally females (Neale, 1981: 25-6).

Humour is another feature which is used in combination with violence. In the Spanish films that I will study, and especially in *Torrente*, the use of humour plays an important role in relation to violence. According to Cynthia M. King in her article on the effects of humour in violent action films, humour can either heighten reactions to the film or, on the contrary, it can lessen distressing reactions, depending on the gender of the spectators (2000: 7). Humour can also be considered a device to attract young audiences, and indeed, a combination of

violence and humour is an appealing recipe for success. Some research has also demonstrated that cartoons are seen by children as less violent than any other fiction film (Rubio Moraga, 2003: 586). Humour can mitigate or lessen violence to a certain extent depending on the gender of the spectator. For example, for male viewers ‘exposed to hero humour found the film<sup>28</sup> marginally less distressing, but rated depictions of real violence more distressing’ (King, 2000: 1). In this study 80 male and 80 female viewers completed a questionnaire after watching ‘four edited versions of a violent film manipulated to differ in terms of humorous content: (a) no humor, (b) hero humor only, (c) villain humor only, and (d) hero and villain humor’ (2000: 13). As King points out, what is normally found is that viewers show a positive reaction toward action heroes and their use of humour, however, in this study, ‘females generally reported the hero to be crueller and less likable than did male participants’ (2000: 20). This may have been because the hero’s use of humour may have increased the female viewers’ distress. On the other hand, as male viewers are more sympathetic toward the hero, they were more positive about his humour in violent scenes, which therefore, had a mitigating effect on the male spectators’ distress (King, 2000: 20).

Violence is indeed a common feature in adolescent comedies or horror films, and violence has an entertainment value (Hill, 1997: 20). In making horror films attractive to spectators, film-makers need to consider what ‘they perceive to be the lived experiences, fears and anxieties of that audience, with the terms of engagement both aesthetic and ideological’ (Hutchings, 2002: 121). Furthermore,

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<sup>28</sup> This refers to the action film shown to the spectators: *The Hitman* (Aaron Norris, 1991)

violence plays an important role in the aesthetic and ideological level for these films as will be demonstrated in the analysis later in the chapter. The high number of sequels shows that this subgenre is indeed profitable for the American film industry, and that the young public is interested in this genre. Due to this success and considering that youngsters are the most important audience for the cinema, some Spanish films have recently been seen following the American model, films such as *School Killer*, which I discuss in the next section.

My definition of adolescent cinema differs partially from those found in most of the aforementioned academic discourses. Not only films about teenagers or young adults are included in this category but also those films which are adolescent in terms of being ‘new products’ that have come out in the new production context of 1990s in Spanish cinema, and which are mainly aimed at young audiences. I will include in this classification the so-called ‘new vulgarities’ (Triana-Toribio, 2003: 151), films which mainly aim at young audiences, although their main protagonists are not necessarily teenagers. The term ‘new vulgarities’ has been used by Nuria Triana-Toribio in her book on Spanish cinema in which she defines these neo-vulgar comedies which target young Spanish audiences (2003: 151-155). This cinema is normally characterised in opposition to the European tradition of quality cinema, and particularly, to the 1980s government promotion of quality cinema, reflected in the film policy of Pilar Miró. Films like *Acción mutante* (Alex de La Iglesia, 1993), *Justino, un asesino de la tercera edad* (La Cuadrilla, 1994), *El día de la bestia* (Alex de la Iglesia, 1995), *Airbag* (Juanma Bajo Ulloa, 1997) and *El milagro de P. Tinto*

(Javier Fresser, 1998) are representative of the kind of cinema that Triana-Toribio considers as 'new vulgarities'.

Nevertheless, the use of adjectives like 'neo-vulgar' or nouns like 'vulgarities' implies a negative connotation and evaluation of these films, and therefore, the academic community tends to include these films in 'low' categories of cinema. As Esquirol and Fecé argue, critical academic discourses tend to reject these new productions since they represent the opposite of 'high' quality cinema. They accuse the academic community and film reviewers of not being able to consider these films in the context of the entertainment industry since the milieu of Spanish cinema has changed during the last decade, transforming cinematic styles and genres (Esquirol and Fecé, 2001: 30-33). They also point out the fact that these films are aimed at young audiences: adolescents and youngsters under thirty years old (2001: 33), perhaps because they are somehow seen as incapable of appreciating 'quality cinema'. Academics have certainly ignored these 'low' category films principally because film studies have followed the tradition adopted by literary studies which would normally study the most important plays or novels following a traditional canon. In contrast, cultural studies has considered popular texts as acceptable subjects for academic study, and my study, influenced by cultural studies, does consider both types of films, given that their presence is now significant in the cinema industry both in Spain and worldwide.

Other studies of Spanish audiences demonstrate that the cinema is the most popular leisure activity for youngsters under thirty one years old, especially

15-18 years olds, both male and female, mostly middle class, with a medium or high level of education (Palacio, 2005: 388; Pelaz, 2002: 224-235). It is also significant that during the period 1996-1999 there was a significant increase in the building of new leisure centres in suburbs in which multiplex cinemas play a key role and whose main audiences are young spectators<sup>29</sup> (2003: 8).

What, then, is the secret of the success of the *Torrente* series or *[REC]*? In his article on *Torrente*, Heredero argues that films like this appeal to a young audience ‘because they combine recognizable features of classic American genres (thrillers, high comedy, science fiction, horror/fantasy, etc.) with the codes, stereotypes, stars and tastes of specific Spanish filmic traditions (family drama, surrealism, black/grotesque comedy, social realism, etc).’ (Heredero, 1999a: 23). In addition, some critics point out that the incorporation of American genres into these films is also characterised by bad taste and excessive use of violence (Triana-Toribio, 2003: 155). Caparrós also argues that this popular new cinema of the 1990s coincides with the government policy of the period 1996 – 2003 in which the right-wing Spanish Popular party encouraged private investment and decided to gradually reduce public subsidies for Spanish cinema in contrast to the socialist policy of the 1980s (2005: 14).

The director of *Torrente*, Santiago Segura, also admits that this film is representative of what he calls ‘realismo sucio costumbrista’ (gritty/crude social realism)<sup>30</sup> which recycles elements of local distinctiveness. As Jordan points out,

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<sup>29</sup> Bulletin *Tendencias* by Instituto de la Cinematografía y de las Artes Audiovisuales published by the Spanish Ministry of Culture in [www.mcu.es/cine](http://www.mcu.es/cine).

<sup>30</sup> Translated by Jordan and Allinson, 2005, p. 111.

this kind of 'realism' connects 'the vicious humour of the Spanish 'esperpento'<sup>31</sup> (macabre/grotesque story) and the black comedies of the 1950s and 1960s made by Berlanga, Fernán Gómez, Ferreri, Forqué, etc' (2003: 198).

It is my contention that these adolescent comedies also show violence which shapes certain stylistic features and characters like *Torrente* who becomes a kind of sympathetic 'monster' for the public. According to Jordan,

Such an accumulation of violent images, 'excess' realism and radical shifts of tone jolt the spectator and radically disrupt any complacent immersion in sadistic voyeurism. Indeed, occasionally, Segura seems to wish to punish such audience voyeurism, undermining audience engagement with screen violence that in itself is far too 'realistic' and sickening' (2003: 202).

Jordan is right when he states that there seems to be an excessive use of violence in *Torrente*. However, he does not mention here the importance of humour in this kind of violent excess which is used to mitigate any possible negative (not necessarily sickening) effects on the spectator.

With regard to how spectators react to films, some film scholars such as Celestino Deleyto and his colleagues have undertaken general ethnographic audience research in which they demonstrate that Spanish 'spectators are often wary of the ideology of the Hollywood films they consume but remain largely oblivious to the specific ways in which that ideology works' (2002: 59). Deleyto bases his study on film scholar Andrew Britton's concept of 'the ideology of entertainment'. Britton argues that American films in the 1980s present a world which differs from reality and which is made to escape from this reality just for

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<sup>31</sup> 'Esperpento' is a literary genre created by novelist, playwright, and poet Ramón del Valle-Inclán in which reality is distorted by focusing on grotesque features (Hopewell, 1986: 60).

the purpose of entertainment (1986: 4). Violence will be one of the elements which helps to shape and disguise this reality.

Deleyto undertook a qualitative study with interviews of three groups of spectators from different ages. The results were promising for future ethnographic studies on this topic. They shed some light on the awareness of audiences of this ideology of entertainment and concluded that audience motivations for going to the cinema are 'to have a good time, to see a film which keeps them entertained and to see films which make them not think too much'. In addition, this study has also shed some light on the reception of violence. With regard to this topic, these were the main results (Deleyto et al. 2002: 63-64):

- Most people reject violence in cinema as well as excessive suffering. It is not worth going to the cinema to suffer.
- Despite this statement, some of the participants in these interviews point out that they do not mind seeing a violent film as long as 'violence makes people understand life or explains something about human behaviour'.
- The participants argue that violence is part of life and if films did not show violence, they would not be realistic.
- Most participants reject violence when it is gratuitous, but if this violence makes people think about current social problems, they think violent representations can be more acceptable.
- Finally, young audiences do not appear to be especially troubled by representations of violence since this is part of the spectacle and for

this audience a spectacular show is an essential feature for a good film. Some of the spectators say that they are normally disappointed after seeing a film in which they had expected to see a more spectacular and violent show.

In this article the authors argue that this aesthetic interest in violence demonstrates that young people become passive spectators as they accept the violence and even demand it as an essential feature. However, all participants were aware that the violence could not affect them directly since films are not part of 'their reality' (Deleyto et al. 2002: 64). Hence, violence plays a significant role in the expectations of the spectators, especially if films are aimed at young audiences. In addition, youngsters do not seem to worry about the possible effects on the audience since they are aware that they are watching fiction. Although this is a relevant study, its conclusions could also be questioned since the interviewee may say something when asked an abstract question, but then actually do another when it comes to their viewing habits.

This topic also links with one of the myths of media violence mentioned in the introductory chapter. Do spectators really demand violence? Or do they demand arousal instead? W. James Potter agrees that violent stories may stimulate viewers, providing them with certain physiological responses (2003: 127). However, he thinks that the key ingredient is 'arousal', and he argues that 'violence is not the only tool that can be used to arouse violence'. In addition, as pointed out in this thesis, violence is also accompanied by other cinematic

elements such as fast editing, loud music, sounds, mise-en-scène, features among many other devices which will indeed help to generate arousal in the spectator. Also it will be demonstrated in this chapter that these cinematic elements are more frequent and intense in the films analysed here which are representative of the adolescent cinema.

With regard to popular Spanish cinema, Lázaro Reboll has published several interesting articles. He deals with films like *Torrente*, and horror films such as Narciso Ibáñez Serrador's *La residencia*. His chosen material has led to the study of films which have hardly been studied in Spanish cinema, but that deserve the attention of academia for their relevance to the history of Spanish cinema and its audiences. As Nuria Triana-Toribio points out 'while it is right to be taken aback by the prejudices so blatantly aired in these films, it would be an intellectual mistake to simply turn our backs on them and pretend that this major part of Spanish film production did not exist' (2003: 152).

In his article on *Torrente*, Lázaro Reboll uses the term 'event film' introduced by Thomas Austin to demonstrate that a few films like *Torrente* have changed Spanish cinema in terms of reception at home and abroad (2005: 221-222). He analyses how *Torrente* is advertised with merchandising products (film book, videogames, fan sites amongst others), and therefore exploits all kind of possible economic markets. I agree with Lázaro Reboll that the *Torrente* series of films have 'certainly made their mark in the contemporary canon of Spanish cinema' (2005: 226) in terms of combining Hollywood and Spanish aesthetics in order to gain commercial success. However, in the process of combining these

two aesthetics, representations of violence can be analysed as some of these main elements which build what Austin (2002) calls 'event' films, the small number of films in any year which manage to attract even those who do not normally attend cinemas.

*Torrente* is not only an 'event' film, it also follows Wyatt's notion of high concept films. According to Wyatt 'High concept can be considered as one central development - and perhaps the central development - within post-classical cinema, a style of filmmaking moulded by economic and institutional forces' (1994: 8), and this style of filmmaking creates films which are accompanied by significant marketing campaigns, which was the case for *Torrente*. Furthermore, another element of 'high concept' was the use of stars, with the appearance of Santiago Segura, in numerous TV programmes and in other films such *El día de la bestia*, Santiago Segura was very well known to audiences, especially young audiences.

Whilst new adolescent films came out in the 1990s, teen violent films also existed in previous decades in various forms. Protagonists of Spanish youth films have been called 'desarraigados', in other words, youngsters who have no kind of link with their social, physical, or ideological environment (Cueto, 1998: 9). It was especially in the 1960s when youth cinema with films like *Los golfos* (Carlos Saura, 1960), *Los chicos* (Marco Ferreri, 1959) and *El espontáneo* (Jorge Grau, 1964), was influenced by a neorealist tradition which showed the social difficulties of young people at that time. After the death of Franco a wave of films about youth came out, due to the end of censorship and the profound social and

economic changes in Spanish society. Most youth films, especially delinquency youth films, dealt with topics of drug addiction, suburban problems of big cities, sex or divorce, which were more or less forbidden topics during the dictatorship. *Perros callejeros* (José Antonio de la Loma, 1977), *El Torette* (José Antonio de la Loma, 1980), *Navajeros* (Eloy de la Iglesia, 1980), *El Pico* (Eloy de la Iglesia, 1983) portray juvenile delinquency in different neighbourhoods and suburbs of Madrid and Barcelona.

In the 1980s with the government policy of quality cinema, few youth films were produced, since the government only seemed to encourage literary adaptations which were synonymous with the kind of prestige and metaphorical cinema represented by directors such as Carlos Saura and Víctor Erice. However, it is worth mentioning the alternative to this 'quality' cinema represented by films of Pedro Almodóvar produced in the context of the 'movida madrileña', the Madrid 'underground scene' in the early 1980s (Jordan and Allinson, 2005: 28), films which were mainly aimed at young audiences. Films such as *Pepi, Luci, Bom y otras chicas del montón* (Almodóvar, 1980) dealt with topics which were considered taboo and politically incorrect at the time of their release (sex, masochism, transsexuals), and by featuring these topics, Almodóvar is clearly adopting a political stance in reaction to the previous censorship of Franco's regime.

It was in the 1990s that genre films and numerous youth films emerged with new directors. They did not deal with historical events from the dictatorship but rather they focused on depictions of youngsters who had displayed nihilistic

behaviour. According to Jesús Palacios ‘the rebellion of young people is principally bland....it does not emerge as cinema for denunciation, not even as a dramatic call for attention’ (Palacios, 1998: 116). Film scholar Isolina Ballesteros has analysed some of the violent representations in Spanish films which can be categorised as literary and auteurist films. In her essay ‘Juventudes problemáticas en el cine de los ochenta y noventa’ (Problematic youth in the cinema of the 1980s and 1990s), she analyses the way two popular films which deal with the situation of youngsters in Spain represent violence and sex: *Historias del Kronen* (Monxto Armendáriz, 1995) and *Salto al vacío* (Daniel Calparsoro, 1995). She argues that these two films embody the pessimistic and nihilistic attitude of youngsters and use violence in order to emphasise this negative context (2001: 246-7). However, further analysis should be undertaken since she focuses on the cultural and contextual representations of violence, but does not analyse how these violent representations can be considered as a major feature in the adolescent genre films in terms of production and reception contexts and generic and stylistic conventions. My analysis, on the other hand, will consider not only the cultural contexts of the films, but also the generic and stylistic features of these violent representations as well as the films’ reception context.

With the emergence of genres new films like *Torrente* and *School Killer* have materialised, the first as a hybrid genre mixing local and American references, and the second as a copy of American narratives typical of teen slasher films. As mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, this study will seek to establish whether violence is used for social denunciation or purely for

entertainment in the adolescent genre, and whether these violent representations are shaped by an adolescent audience which demands violence, and specifically more graphic, spectacular and explicit violence. I will also look at their stylistic features and ask to what extent the protagonists and the violence are presented to us as representative of a social and cultural reality. I will now proceed to analyse how violence is portrayed in these three different films and how these representations can be characteristic of such an important genre: adolescent films. In addition, it will be shown that the representations of violence will be very different in the three films analysed.

*Torrente* has become one of the most profitable films in the history of the Spanish film industry. Due to its success, Santiago Segura has continued his saga with *Torrente 2: misión en Marbella* and *Torrente 3*. Profits from the first film have reached almost 11 million euros and the film has been seen by more than three million people, *Torrente 2* reached more than 20 million euros and more than 5 million spectators, and finally *Torrente 3* grossed 18 million euros and 3 million spectators<sup>32</sup>. In addition, it is worth mentioning that the film had an 18 certificate, but this did not affect its reception by young audiences as the Spanish rating system is based on recommendations. This means that spectators younger than 18 years old could legally attend the screening of *Torrente*. All this makes the *Torrente* series the most profitable series in the history of the Spanish film industry and justifies its relevance for this study as a film aimed at young audiences, despite the criticisms it has attracted from the academic community.

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<sup>32</sup> Figures from the Spanish Ministry of Education database. 8<sup>th</sup> August 2003.

*Torrente* tells the story of José Luis Torrente (Santiago Segura), an ex-policeman in his 40s who is racist, sexist, rude and who has an extreme-right-wing ideology. He lives with his old father Felipe, played by the well-known actor Tony Leblanc, whom he treats very badly even though he is in a wheelchair. New neighbours move into the building and he becomes a friend of Rafi (Javier Cámara) to get closer to his attractive sister, Amparito (Neus Asensi). He also discovers a band of drug traffickers operating in a Chinese restaurant near his home. The appeal of this character is evidently not that he represents the typical hero-policeman who is going to save humanity from evil figures: quite the reverse, *Torrente* represents the anti-hero in a middle-low class district of Madrid. An interesting study entitled 'Rebels Without a Cause? Adolescents and Their Antiheroes' several psychiatrists' (Bostic et al. 2003: 1) concludes that the appeal of the antiheroes is related to the fact that adolescents need to separate their identities from the role models of their parents or other model figures. Therefore, fiction also plays an important part in showing an anti-hero who is shown as closer to adolescents, or to any audience who might be identified with an anti-heroic vision.

The narrative image of the film also helps the spectator to build this violent character. The title implies that the spectator is not going to encounter a clever character like James Bond. In fact, Torrente is the 'dumb arm of the law'. The poster of the film exemplifies a parody of Bond-like characters as Torrente appears as a 'cutre' (scruffy) character with sunglasses and a gun. In addition, in the DVD menu all protagonists are literally shot one after the other whilst the

various options for the film are shown in the menu. Therefore, here we find a good example of merchandising used as a way of introducing a violent character, and a film in which the audience will expect to find violence as a spectacular feature. This introduction with the use of narrative image with violent elements is used to attract audiences, especially young spectators.

Not only has this kind of merchandising helped to promote this film to Spanish teenagers but so also has the continuous appearance of the actor and director, Santiago Segura in numerous television programmes trying to convince his 'amiguetes' (his friends), especially young spectators, to join him in his cinematic adventure (Lázaro Reboll, 2005: 220). This merchandising and self-promotion was extremely successful.

In the first sequence of *Torrente*, the initial credits of the films are combined with Torrente driving along the streets of Madrid at night when he starts his rounds at midnight. Whilst in typical Bond-like films the archetypal prop of a luxurious and effective car is normally presented, in *Torrente* the protagonist drives a SEAT car, which is not only a local brand but also a quite common one among lower-middle class Spaniards. No luxury or super car is shown. With the use of close-ups of different objects that we find in the car, the spectator identifies that the protagonist is a nationalist (a Francoist flag is shown at the back of the car), which may imply, as is confirmed later in this scene, that he is a Fascist. In addition, other props within the mise-en-scène make the spectator assume that he is a fan of Atlético de Madrid, one of the most important football teams in Spain, as we see the logo of the club in his car. In the context of his persona and the

actions we witness, the connotations of football here are of hooliganism rather than dedicated sports fandom. Hence, a few minutes into the film, and with just a few cinematic techniques like *mise-en-scène*, the spectator will be faced with a character who seems to support various forms of violence. However, they are again presented with a comic perspective which conditions the audience reaction to the film as a whole, and its comedy significantly weakens the impression of violence. Comedy derives from the incongruence of Torrente's reaction to the violence around him. Even before this opening sequence, there is much parody of genres, as the opening music suggests a US superproduction, but Torrente's appearance, through curtains, as if on a stage, is highly theatrical. Thus, parody and humour are present from the very beginning, and play a significant role throughout together with the use of local references.

How can a violent character who is so fascist, vulgar, and misogynist be the protagonist of the most profitable Spanish film in the history of the industry? The formula for success is mainly due to a mixture of local features, the parody of Bond-like characters, use of humour, and especially the spectacular features that young audiences expect in this genre, and indeed one of the main ingredients of these spectacular effects, namely, violence.

Torrente does not care about the presence of violence in the streets. At the beginning of the film, he is not seeking justice, but rather he seems to tolerate any kind of violent behaviour. He is the witness of different robberies, assaults and he does not react by defending the victims of these violent acts but instead shows indifference, and sometimes actually reinforces these violent acts by the language

he uses. Whilst Torrente is driving along the streets, the spectator will be adopting his point of view, as a hand-held camera position behind him is combined with subjective point-of-view shots. In addition, the initial suspense music changes into more popular Spanish music with the use of a song by Fary<sup>33</sup> which instead of creating suspense, adds a kind of festivity and humorous atmosphere, whilst the spectator sees only the underworld in the city of Madrid.

Torrente tolerates various forms of violence. For instance, while driving he sees two prostitutes and he says: 'Look at all those whores'. He also sees a couple arguing and watches as the male partner stabs his girlfriend. Torrente does not react to this but in fact he says: 'love, two lovebirds' which demonstrates that he supports all kinds of domestic violence. Later in the scene, he decides to stop his car when he sees an immigrant, accusing him of selling illegal food, but in fact the immigrant is an innocent victim who is just carrying some food in his bag. Torrente breaks the immigrant's finger and steals the food. Not only does Torrente fail to criticise domestic violence and delinquency, in addition, he is shown as a racist since the immigrant becomes the innocent victim for simply carrying some food. Santiago Segura, admits that 'the protagonist is a fascist, but the film is not at all. It is just the opposite, it speaks against anything related to fascism, and everything is shown with irony' (DVD extras).

Despite this combination of humorous irony and violence, further questions emerge. Does his lack of a strong reaction in any way suggest that Spanish society is immune to violence and excess? And are there no authority

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<sup>33</sup> El Fary, the Spanish singer José Luis Cantero, was famous for singing 'coplas', 'light, sentimental ballads. He composed 'Apatrullando la ciudad' ('Patrolling the city') as the signature tune for the Torrente series' (Obituary in *The Guardian*, 21<sup>st</sup> June 2007).

figures in a post-dictator society? This opens a debate which remains unresolved. As Jordan points out the film ‘calls up and reworks the conventions and stereotypes of Spain’s exploitation genre cinema of the late-Franco period’ (2002: 204). Clearly, with its use of violence, *Torrente* presents these stereotypes to the extreme, and he becomes a transgressive character who does what he wants without any restraint. In addition, the fact that Segura exploits stereotypes may reinforce the kind of ‘new racism’ present in our societies that I have referred to in Chapter Three, although his motive is clearly a crass humour rather than any kind of social denunciation.

All the initial psychological and physical violence in the film is what generated a debate in the media about the film’s quality. Understandably, film critics take two different positions, both exemplified in a double review which appeared in the magazine *Fotogramas*. Two prestigious film critics, Jordi Costa and Nuria Vidal gave completely different evaluations of this film. Jordi Costa praised this film. He defined it as an ‘authentic apotheosis of politically incorrect humour.....in which punching makes us laugh, and this returns the Spanish comedy to the quintessential model of humour used by Azcona’ (1998: 11). By contrast, Nuria Vidal, comparing it to other films by American and Spanish directors points out that

violence by itself is not bad, it depends on how you use it, Tarantino exaggerates it and takes it onto the comic ground...Azcona, with Berlanga, Ferreri or García Sánchez, converts violence into grotesque. All authors tell stories which are not far away from the ones that Torrente tells, but the difference is that Santiago Segura does not establish a distance between its images and the spectator: there is no irony, no humour, cynicism or criticism. There is an immediate impression of reality which makes the spectator identify with this. And this is what makes violence seen as reactionary (1998: 11).

Hence, Nuria Vidal takes the concept of violence as her main critical point when she evaluates this film. It is to violence that she refers when she points out how negatively disabled characters are portrayed in this film, referring to the character of Chus Lampreave's handicapped daughter. Vidal finally justifies her position with a third explanation: 'Trash culture is rich and it is nothing to do with presenting the trash as a cultural category' (1998: 11). She argues that she is not against popular culture but Santiago Segura has not found a middle way in his portrayal of popular culture, and according to her this film belongs to the category of trash.

These two different positions dominate the debate about the quality of this film. The controversy helped to publicise it and what statistics show is that Spanish audiences were enthusiastic about it<sup>34</sup>. I agree with Nuria Vidal that the danger of this film, especially for young audiences, is that they might be tempted to adopt or identify with some racist or violent comments that the protagonist displays.

However, those violent comments tempered by humour, which certainly plays a very important role in this film, and indeed this combination of violence and humour and parody not only make the spectator laugh in several scenes, but also distances the spectator from violent acts, so mitigating possible bad effects on the audience. Some film critics such as C. Tookey (1992: 19) argue that humour found in action may produce a relief in tense scenes and this is what happens in

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<sup>34</sup> 3.010.736 spectators in cinemas according to the Spanish Ministry of Culture database.

*Torrente*, especially in the last action scenes of the film. I disagree with Nuria Vidal's view that there is no parody in this film. Parody is used here with a combination of different genres (comedy and thriller), spectacular features in the narrative, special effects and violence. All these elements create a film which appealed to adolescents who are the largest cinema audience today. A very good example of this amalgam of elements is the climactic sequence in which Torrente tries to save Madrid from some drug dealers who have kidnapped his girlfriend, who is portrayed as a 'prostitute'. As if he were a Quixote-like figure, Torrente is accompanied throughout the film by Rafi (Javier Cámara), who wants to become a full-time policeman instead of working in a fishmongers, and will help Torrente to save his cousin, Torrente's girlfriend.

Torrente and his friends are preparing a bomb in a car in a warehouse in which they are to meet Farelli, the main drug dealer. There they will need to exchange a briefcase in order to free Torrente's girlfriend. Whilst Torrente and his 'amiguetes' (friends) are waiting for this, the bomb accidentally explodes causing the death of one of the 'amiguetes' just as he put the bomb under the car. Also, the car explodes earlier than planned which causes a spectacular and violent fight between the drug dealers and Torrente's friends.

It is precisely in this climactic scene that all the cinematic features satisfy the spectator's expectations. With the use of some elements of the *mise-en-scène* the director establishes the opposition of the two groups in conflict, the drug dealers, well dressed in black suits, and Torrente and his 'amiguetes', dressed in everyday dirty clothes. The characters start shooting each other, and spectacular

special effects are used for the munitions. Fast editing is used to emphasise the violent scene, as this increases the pace of the film and the anxiety and suspense that the spectator is experiencing. In addition, non-diegetic orchestral music increases the feeling of suspense and action. When Torrente has escaped with the briefcase of money and everything seems to be finished, he then decides to come back to rescue his friend. Like a *Mission Impossible* hero, Torrente starts shooting people whilst he seems to fly and shoot at the same time, thanks to the use of slow motion. Meanwhile, Rafi is going to be killed by Farelli and finally it is a Chinese girl that they had met earlier in the film in a Chinese restaurant who shoots Farelli from behind and saves Rafi. Once saved, he quotes a famous sentence from *Rambo* adding a humorous note at the end of the sequence: ‘Dios mío, esto es un infierno’ (‘Oh, my God, this is hell’).

Other violent sequences also exemplify the way violence is used gratuitously and for the sake of spectacle. This is the case in the sequence in which a Chinese man is tortured by drug dealers. Graphic and extreme violence is shown here. Santiago Segura claims he is paying homage to a scene from a Spanish film called *Nadie hablará de nosotros cuando hayamos muerto* (Agustín Díaz Yanes, 1995) (DVD extras). Close-ups of the victim’s face, covered with blood, the use of diegetic sound, and the victim’s shouts of desperation emphasise a violent act. What is indeed more disturbing is when Farrelli cuts off the Chinese man’s ear, which reminds us of a similar scene in *Reservoir Dogs* (Quentin Tarantino, 1992). Such graphic violence is shown with a medium shot of Farelli taking the dismembered part. Finally, the victim is shot in the head: Torrente is

hidden but watching this violent act, and the spectator witnesses it from his perspective.

Another example of the violence of Torrente's racism is the sequence in which he dreams about some immigrants who try to attack him on the streets of Madrid, thus taking revenge for having broken an immigrant's finger at the beginning of the film. Whilst normally the immigrants are the victims of society, in his dream Torrente becomes the victim. Again, the use of humour has the effect of distancing the spectator from Torrente's racist behaviour; he gives the immigrants a piece of meat that he is throwing away, so treating them like animals dying of starvation. The immigrants end up chasing the piece of meat. When Torrente thinks that he is safe, he sees from a high angle an immigrant driving a nail into one of his feet. Once again, violence and parody are shown in this sequence, but just as pure entertainment and spectacle, without having the effect of critique of any violent act.

Whilst *Torrente* is a good example of a hybrid action comedy which gives the adolescent spectator what he or she expects from entertainment, *School Killer* belongs to another sub-genre of adolescent cinema: the slasher film. It tells the story of six youngsters who decide to spend a week-end partying in an abandoned school away from all civilisation. Once they get to the school, a series of strange events happen there. They presume that the ghost of a former security guard who killed a group of students 27 years previously is chasing the school's new guests. The young protagonists need to prevent this becoming a crime like the one which led to the school's closure.

Although this film was not as successful as *Torrente*<sup>35</sup>, Carlos Gil's first feature film represents a good example of the increase in production of Spanish 'teen horrors' (Jordan and Allinson 2005: 2), a phenomenon of adolescent cinema in which violence is a key element of success. Other films recently released have been *El arte de morir* (Álvaro Fernández Armero, 2000) and *Tuno negro* (Pedro Barbero and Vicente Martín, 2001) which show an interest from new directors in adapting American teen films into Spanish cinema, merging the formers' ingredients with the latter's local references.

This film can be considered a good example of adapting the genre of slasher film to Spanish cinema. In fact, the title again shows some aspects of that narrative image. The title is in English, which, rather than creating an alienating product, may attract spectators who go to see horror films since most of them have English titles. In addition, we, as spectators, know in advance that the spectator will be facing a school killer, which implies a high dose of violence taking into account the expectations held by the audience when seeing horror films. The poster adds certain gothic elements, for example, dark shadow inside a space in which the protagonists will be facing darkness and mystery. Moreover, there is a subtitle taken from the last sentence in the film which warns the audience of what it is going to see: 'All of us will be killed'. The same question that we formulated in *Torrente* will be posed here: Can we imagine a film like *School Killer* not showing a high dose of explicit violence? Generic, stylistic,

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<sup>35</sup> According to the Ministry of Culture database this film grossed 804.033,05 € and was seen by 201.024 spectators. These figures can be considered a success for a Spanish horror film. [http://www.mcu.es/jsp/plantilla\\_wai.jsp?id=13&area=cine](http://www.mcu.es/jsp/plantilla_wai.jsp?id=13&area=cine) (accessed 08 August 2006)

cinematic, narrative elements and audience will shape these violent representations as will be demonstrated in this analysis.

*School Killer's* first sequence starts with a car driving along a motorway. The non diegetic soundtrack (rock music) is the first indicator that this film is targeted at younger audiences. Before the initial credits, the film title appears in red capital letters occupying most of the screen. The title raises the expectation of violence, as do the red colours, representing the blood to be shed in the film. Medium and long shots of the car and the school to which it is heading are juxtaposed in order to present to the spectator the main characters and contextualise the setting where the violent actions will be shown. In this first sequence, apparent normality is broken when the music is distorted once the characters get to the school. The *mise-en-scène* introduces a setting typical of a slasher film, here an abandoned school in an isolated place, foggy weather, the diegetic sound and the blue and cold tones emphasise a gothic atmosphere where the spectator will find a confrontation between the characters and the school killer. In fact, in the Spanish release, there is a subtitle for the title of the film: 'el vigilante' (the watcher). Therefore, the audience can assume that the ensuing violent conflict will be between 'el vigilante' and the protagonists.

It is precisely this division between good and evil characters which represent the stereotypical division between victims and aggressors in this film. It is relevant that the school killer is represented by a well-known star of Spanish horror cinema of the 1970s and 1980s: Paul Nashy (whose real name is Jacinto Molina). Nashy plays a very different character from the werewolf that he

represented 26 years earlier in *La maldición de la bestia* (Miguel Iglesia, 1975). Spanish horror has changed through this period and in this film Nashy represents the killer typical of American slasher films, normally portrayed as a supernatural aggressor.

One of the most violent sequences portrayed in the film happens when Ramón (Carlos Fuentes) is telling the story of what happened in the school 27 years ago. The script shows a flashback in which several students, Ramón's father among them, were spending a weekend and were taken aback by the presence of the 'vigilante' (Paul Nashy). The use of graphic violence increases progressively. For instance, when he finds a girl in the toilet, he starts asking her whether she has asked her parents' permission to spend a weekend together with her friends. As the victims have transgressed the rules of the 'vigilante', he says: 'I want you to respect the school norms', and starts his massacre. He kills his victim, beating her against the wall several times before putting her head in the toilet. This violent act is stylistically portrayed with the juxtaposition of diegetic and non-diegetic sound as the screams of the victim and the music emphasise a violent act. This extreme graphic violence is what is expected by the audience of horror films. Shots of graphic violence are juxtaposed with medium shots of the aggressor. Another juxtaposition is between two different settings, the room in which the protagonist are having a party, which contrasts violently with the bathroom in which one of the girls is killed. Different tones differentiate these two settings in the school and thus set two different moods (violence versus partying) for the spectator.

Once the murderer has killed his first victim, the spectator is aware that 'the watcher' will go for more. With the sound of panting and gasping, and subjective point-of-view shots from the aggressor's perspective, the director makes the spectators anticipate that they will soon be presented with another murder. Later in the film, a couple go into another room at the school to have sex, an act which transgresses the killer's rules, and therefore motivates his next murders. Once again, the use of extreme graphic violence is predominant, and meets audience expectations. Fast editing and the use of diegetic and non-diegetic sound increase the effect of tension that these kinds of sequences normally provoke in the spectator. Particularly graphic is the scene in which the 'vigilante' takes an axe and beheads the male victim. Thanks to a medium shot, the spectator clearly sees his severed head and this is an example of the use of excess in terms of graphic portrayal, a feature which is part of that spectacular narrative in this kind of genre.

In addition, the stereotypical way the victims of those violent acts are portrayed responds to the expectations of the audience. Jordi (Zoe Berriatúa), who carries a camera in his cap and continuously quotes famous American films, mainly represents the typical cowardly character. Then, there are Pam (Elena Candorcio), who provides all kinds of esoteric explanations for some situations, María (Olivia Molina), the typical naïve character and Sandra (Carmen Morales) who is the brave woman ready to confront this violent situation. Ramón (Carlos Fuentes) represents the wise-guy character who leads all of them and also leads the narrative of the film as he is the one who knows what happened in the school

in the past. Finally, there is an Angolan-born actor who plays Larry and brings a foreign accent to a Spanish film, probably making the film more appealing to foreign audiences.

In slasher films (Shary, 2002: 137) the heroine is normally represented as attractive, tall and virginal. However, in some examples (see *Tuno Negro*) she ends up being the killer. The end of this film shows a twist in which three characters, Jordi, Ramón and Pam, survive as they try to escape from the 'vigilante' who might be still alive. However, whilst they are listening to the radio, they hear a news bulletin which informs them that police have found five dead bodies in an old school. This creates the assumption that there will be no survivors. With a juxtaposition in close-up of the three characters which emphasises the victims' desperation, the film finishes with a crane shot which fades into a pitch-black screen, then the spectator hears a shout from a female character who says: 'Nos van a matar a todos' ('They will kill us all'). This open ending which reflects an unresolved conflict gives the possibility of creating sequels in the future if the film is a box-office success. All the characters, both aggressors and victims, are built up by a series of genre features which certainly construct a film whose essential element for success is violence.

It is relevant to mention the continuous use of intertextuality which anticipates the horror and suspense that the spectator will find. All actors make continuous references to American horror films: 'I hope we are not in *Elm Street*' 'Did we take everything with us? Yes, I even took the garlic and the stake', 'Have you seen *Scream 3*?' Some other metafilmic references have the effect of

comparing European and American films. For example, when the characters are divided into two different groups in the school, one of the female protagonists says: ‘In *The Blair Witch Project*, the first one who is killed is the one who carried a camera all the time’. The character who is actually carrying a camera says: ‘Well. We’re in Europe and we don’t do it like that here’. These intertextual references have two main effects: first, to anticipate the violence of this film and second, to give some humour to the scene and therefore, mitigate the tension and violence which will be expected. However, the difference between *Torrente* and *School Killer* is that *School Killer* is a film which does not rely on comedic elements and the ‘esperpento’ and ‘costumbrismo’<sup>36</sup> traditions, but *School Killer* is purely a slasher film targeted at young audiences who are used to watching American horror films, and therefore expect spectacular scenes and narratives, and above all, violence.

Jaume Balagueró and Paco Plaza’s film *[REC]* also follows the prototype of popular box-office successes whose narratives and styles do not conform to ‘the Miró legislation model of ‘good’ films’ (Triana-Toribio 2003: 151). The success of films such as *[REC]* keeps alive the horror genre in Spanish cinema. In his analysis of trends in Spanish horror cinema, film scholar Andrew Willis argues that Jaume Balagueró is a good example of current Spanish directors who make horror films which show generic unity and realism. He exemplifies his argument with that director’s *Los sin nombre* (1999). He considers that this film is

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<sup>36</sup> ‘Costumbrismo’ is a ‘literary presentation of typical and generally cotemporaneous customs, incidents, institutions, personalities and ways of life’ (Sondrup, Nemoianu and Gillespie, 2004: 333)

a good exercise in psychological terror with a very sophisticated mise-en-scène. He argues that ‘if the audience is laughing and joking too much, they are not going to be unnerved or disturbed by the images in front of them’ (2003: 246). Although *[REC]* is a very different film from *Los sin nombre*, being closer to more graphic horror films and sub-genres such as the zombie film, I argue that certain cinematic codes of realism are present in it, something which will bring the horror and violence into the first person, in other words, the spectators’ world.

In the last few decades popular and box-office hits have normally been downplayed by the critics, however, ‘this success [of *REC*] has led some critics to address their prejudices and find a way of discussing recent horror films’ (Willis, 2003: 248). Willis says this negative trend is changing, since films such as *Los otros* (Alejandro Amenábar, 2001) and *El espinazo del diablo* (Guillermo del Toro, 2001) have been critically acclaimed and they are starting to be considered part of a more serious cinema. *[REC]* also received several awards in the prestigious Sitges Film Festival (best director, best actress, audience award, and critics’ award), as well as other prizes in national and international film festivals. In addition to this success, audiences also flocked to the film. The film grossed six million euros and was seen by a million spectators almost within three weeks of its release. Only another psychological horror film, *El orfanato* (*The Orphanage*) directed by young director Juan Antonio Bayona did better than *[REC]* in 2007. Additionally, the film has been so successful that Hollywood has already produced a remake entitled *Quarantine* (by John Eric Dowdle), which was released in November 2008.

What makes this film original for the Spanish film industry and what is its contribution with regard to representations of violence? According to Costa, both directors have pressed the 'pause' key from their 'academic' projects (a clear reference to films like *Los sin nombre*), and he considers that there is a 'reformulation of horror cinema' as some techniques used in the film are similar to the *Blair Witch Project* (D. Myrick and E. Sánchez, 1999) (2007: 20). British film critic Philip French also mentions that *[REC]* employs similar devices to recent films such as *Cloverfield* (Matt Reeves, 2008) and George Romero's *Diary of the Dead* (2007). He refers to the use of a shaky hand-held camera throughout the film, which makes the spectator see everything through this perspective (2008). As Monaco points out, a moving camera and the use of close-ups, frequent in this film, make the spectator see things from a particular subject position (1981: 170).

*[REC]* tells the story of a reporter, Ángela (Manuela Velasco), the presenter of a TV programme called *While you're asleep*, which is making a documentary on the nocturnal activities of a group of firemen in Barcelona. The spectator sees all the events through the camera perspective which shows the REC sign in the corner when the camera is recording, and which gives the title to the film. Nights are normally monotonous for firemen, with pet rescues or people trapped in lifts. However, this time the firemen arrive at a typical block of apartments in central Barcelona in which an old woman seems to be trapped and shouting disturbingly. After twelve minutes of apparent normality, the suspense and horror start when she bites one of the policemen, ripping half of his face off.

After this extremely violent event, film crew, firemen, policemen and the inhabitants in the block of flats are trapped in a claustrophobic environment as the health authorities decide to quarantine the building.

In order to exemplify some of the aspects which were initially mentioned by film critics, let us consider the initial sequence of *[REC]*, in which Ángela makes her entry looking at the camera and so at the spectator. Hence, this initial sequence introduces this perspective and the format is used throughout the film, that is to say, the spectator sees everything that the camera captures. In addition, the directors do not only present this perspective, but also, by means of an intentional use of metalinguistic devices (fiction within fiction) they display an ironic reflection on the TV-reality shows which invade our screens. This irony in the film will also have an effect on the representation of violence in the film, as will be demonstrated in the analysis of other sequences later in this chapter. One of the directors of the film, Paco Plaza admits that ‘Jaume and I were fantasizing on how to change the mechanisms of the horror cinema’, which is why they thought to use TV language. Plaza comments that ‘previously, good cinema influenced television programmes, but now we are in a new age in which television influences the evolution of cinema’ (Yáñez, 2007: 152).

Hence, generic, stylistic, cinematic, narrative elements which are related to TV reality shows will be intertwined with elements more representative of the horror genre. All these elements will shape the violent representations shown in the film. For example, with regard to the characters in horror films such as *School Killer*, the aggressor is a supernatural character, however, in *[REC]* all the

inhabitants of the building, who are innocent victims, in turn become the aggressors in the film as they are progressively infected by the bites of the other characters. The fact that the aggressors are ordinary people who live in a typical Spanish block of apartments also helps to lend verisimilitude to story and characters. Furthermore, some of the scenes remind us of the well-known comedy-thriller-horror film called *La comunidad* (2000) by Alex de la Iglesia in which all the neighbours of a typical building in Madrid also face a conflict.

One of the most violent and shocking sequences of *[REC]* occurs just after the health officer has told the neighbours a possible explanation of what is happening in the building. He confesses that a veterinarian had warned the health authorities of a dog in his clinic which has become very violent and aggressive, and seemed to be infected by a strange illness. The obligatory chip that this dog wore led them to this building, and that is why they decide it to quarantine it. Suddenly Ángela interrupts the health officer and realises that the dog belongs to the little girl in the group, Jennifer. Then, the spectators witness one of the most disturbing images of the film when Jennifer, who seems to be innocent and sweet, suddenly bites her mother, ripping off part of her face. The violent sequence is emphasised with the effective *mise-en-scène* and camerawork: the camera quickly moves towards Jennifer's mother and the little girl, and with a medium long shot we see her mother saying: 'She's got a sore throat'. César (Carlos Lasarte), an Argentinean neighbour, starts shouting at Jennifer's mother: 'Fuck that' ('Y una mierda'). The cameraman follows the health officer who is approaching the mother and while he tries to calm her down, in a close-up the spectator witnesses

from the left side that the child is approaching her mother's face as if to kiss her, but she finally bites her savagely. Although aware of an extremely violent act, the spectator does not explicitly see it, but the screams and intense red make-up on the mother's face emphasise this disturbing action. In addition, the fact that the violent act is perpetrated by a child probably makes things more distressing for the spectator. Therefore, this scene provides the spectator a thrill of arousal typical of horror films, something that their audiences may expect (Trend, 2007: 89). With regard to the reaction of spectators in *[REC]*, when the film was shown in Sitges Film Festival, the directors had the original idea of recording the spectators in night vision, and used these images to promote the film in one of the trailers created by the film producing company *Filmax* in order to demonstrate that the audience was genuinely terrified and aroused by it<sup>37</sup>.

In contrast with most of the violent scenes in this film, the spectator finds others from which violence is temporarily absent. These scenes do not only have a narrative role in the story, but in addition, provide the spectator with a temporary break from the continuous violence present elsewhere. A good example is the scene in which Ángela starts interviewing some of the neighbours. The directors use a documentary format for interviewing all the people affected by this violent and disturbing event. Off-screen, Ángela starts questioning Miguel, the medical assistant, who tells her (and thus the spectators) that he has never seen anything like this and that the victims who have been bitten are seriously injured. Although there is no violence here, the spectator sees its consequences as the cameraman

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<sup>37</sup> The trailer can be seen in the official webpage of *Filmax* in *Youtube*:  
[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nfgZIMYj\\_NU](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nfgZIMYj_NU)

shows a close-up of the victims' head and neck injuries. Miguel then expresses a feeling of impotence: 'we are locked in this building' - and looking at the camera, and hence the spectators, he says: 'I can't do anything else'. After Miguel is interviewed, an old couple is questioned, and the directors present what is almost a parody of a typical old couple in a Spanish apartment block. In addition, Ángela interviews the Chinese woman who, as an immigrant, is stereotypically portrayed as someone unable to explain properly what has happened that evening as she does not speak Spanish fluently. Despite this, Ángela keeps asking her the same question. Moreover, the directors also portray the prejudices that the Spaniards have against immigrants when the latter try to blame the Chinese woman's father, who is in a wheelchair upstairs, for what is happening in the building. With these interviews and the use of stereotypical characters, the directors criticise the way the media depict a social reality which, although they show it as 'real' and in real time, they nonetheless employ certain conventions purely for the purpose of entertainment. However, as I have mentioned earlier in the thesis, it can be argued that this use of excessive stereotyping may reinforce the 'new racism' in our societies as the main purpose of commercial films such as *[REC]* or *Torrente* is not to critique a social issue but rather, to entertain the public with the use of humour such as parody. These two scenes in *[REC]* also introduce a brief element of humour to the film which may help to relax the tension and arousal caused by the previous violent scenes.

As well as lowering tension, the directors' use of documentary techniques (long and real-time shots), together with hand held camera and diegetic sound

through the film, gives most scenes the ‘realistic’ sense of documentary footage shot-on-the-run and, therefore, emphasise the verisimilitude of the story and the characters’ experiences. Furthermore, those stylistic techniques used consistently throughout the film are elements which contribute to the arousal that the spectator normally demands of this kind of film (Potter, 2003: 128), and this arousal is inextricably linked with violence. In the case of *[REC]* it definitely helps to glamorise violence. This glamorisation is shown by the camera that, according to Plaza, becomes another character in this violent world:

We wanted the camera to be another character, and the action to flow freely. With Jaume, we explained the initial situation, then we gave a few basic instructions to the actors and we would place the camera in the action. The final result was unpredictable, and we were looking for that freshness. In a situation like that, Balagueró says, the challenge was that the improvisations would not affect the story. We had to make an effort to control the chaos. It is a film which has long takes of 30 minutes and a camera with the freedom to move through 360 degrees, the biggest challenge was that the film crew was not slipping into the take. I feel proud that none of the film crew was seen (Yáñez, 2007: 152).

Plaza also points out that it is not coincidental that most of the actors were unknown: ‘we did not want the spectator to be distracted by a familiar face’ (Yáñez, 2007: 152). The only actor who was at all known was the reporter, Ángela (Manuela Velasco) a real TV presenter in one of the private TV channels. Ángela is the most important character and is the victim in the film since it is she who leads the spectators from the very ‘light’ scenes at the very beginning, where we seem to watch a real TV documentary, to the continuous slaughter of innocent victims through to the very end.

In this final scene she does not become the heroine of the typical horror film, but instead she becomes just another victim of the situation, and perhaps a victim of the TV system in which everything needs to be taped and where there are no limits. At the very beginning of the gory scenes she says to the cameramen: ‘Grábalo todo, por tu puta madre’, ‘Pablo, tape everything, for fuck’s sake’, and throughout the film she has several confrontations with a policeman, when he asks them to stop taping. Her answer is clear: ‘We have to tape everything, we have come here for this, we need to tell everybody what is happening’. All these sentences reinforce the attitude of this character who thinks that there are no limits to showing violence as long as it is used to inform the public<sup>38</sup>. The directors here intend to question, even to satirise the limits in the media, something which ironically is portrayed in the film with gore and spectacular violence. Even in the last sequence in which Ángela finds out who lives in the penthouse, there is a demonised girl who might be the cause of all these violent events, the cameramen is bitten and in a close-up of Ángela’s face and from a static camera on the floor we see how she is literally dragged away presumably by the demonised girl. After this, the directors reinsert the sentence: ‘Pablo, tape everything, for fuck’s sake’. In the official web page of the film the sentence appears when you enter the page, which again reinforces the directors’ strategy<sup>39</sup>.

As demonstrated through this analysis, these three films are examples of what has been called adolescent films because of their target audiences. But as a

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<sup>38</sup> This reminds us of the protagonist (Andrea Caracortada) of the film *Kika* (Pedro Almodóvar, 1992), which was a satire on reality TV.

<sup>39</sup> Official web page of the film: <http://movies.filmax.com/rec/>

genre, or demographic sub-genre, they also represent an ‘adolescent phase’ in the development of the Spanish film industry, as they form part of the re-emergence in the 1990s of genres which distance themselves from the quality films of earlier periods of Spanish cinema. My contention is that violence is an essential element of adolescent films, a genre not to be neglected in academia. With multiple examples I have shown in this study that violent representations are determined by genre features, narrative elements, stylistic features of graphic depictions of violence in its multiple forms, and last, but not least, the adolescent audience.

*Torrente* has marked the history of Spanish cinema for the way Santiago Segura constructed the film, combining elements of comedy with the commercial ingredient of violence, itself mitigated with humour in order to parody cultural traditions and stereotypical characterisations. In addition, he takes some features from other cinematic and literary traditions, especially those of comedy and ‘esperpento’. On the other hand, *School Killer* follows the model of a typical slasher film, featuring some local elements, but again using violence as a main ingredient, the violence that shapes the genre and which is presented in a spectacular and very graphic way, following the American models. In addition, humour is present here but is not mixed with violent acts, and so, the mitigation is not as effective as in *Torrente*. Finally, *[REC]* connects with the public as it is an intelligent mixture of horror genre which relies on a typical narrative formula, but in addition, integrates stylistic techniques from horror films with features from other television genres. This mixture of stylistic devices, certain realistic conventions, as well as the use of violence have allowed the directors to produce a

film which appeals to young audiences. Furthermore, despite the modest irony present in the film, it mainly provides what some spectators look for, that is to say, arousal and entertainment, which are inextricably related to the representations of violence as well.

Hence, these adolescent films studied do not use violence in order to critique a social problem as happens with social cinema, but adolescent films use violence as an entertainment feature which is present in the narrative and aesthetics of these texts. Violence is expected by young audiences who also request this kind of commercial films which have led to an emergence of genre cinema which responds to the current ideology of entertainment. In addition, with the use of new special effects, violence is portrayed in a more spectacular way which is closely related to spectacular narratives. If this is the present role of violence in adolescent films it will be interesting to see whether these violent representations will continue in the future of Spanish adolescent cinema.

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## *Conclusion*

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‘My generation is affected by violence on TV. We run the risk of being insensitive to death’

This statement was made by Alejandro Amenábar in one of the interviews published when his first feature film *Tesis* was publicly and critically acclaimed in 1996<sup>40</sup>. The idea behind it, and more especially, the idea of its protagonist, who starts the journey while writing a thesis on violence in film, made me think about the challenging task of embarking on a thesis which would cover not media violence, which has been broadly studied, but rather violence in cinema, and specifically Spanish cinema. Despite all the risks that this task involved, and in particular considering that violence has been studied in numerous different disciplines and from various approaches, what seemed an almost an impossible task at the very beginning of starting to work on this thesis, is now drawing to a close at least in its first stage. It is precisely the fact that the films have been examined using an interdisciplinary approach rather than from a mono-disciplinary perspective that gives the thesis an alternative and original position.

Marsha Kinder’s book *Blood Cinema* was one of the first academic works on Spanish cinema which inspired me to start with this challenging task. Her writing on *La caza* (Carlos Saura, 1965) showed how violence and the aesthetics

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<sup>40</sup> <http://www.elmundo.es/larevista/num70/textos/amena.html>

of violence are very much a relevant topic in Spanish cinema. As mentioned in the introduction, she pointed out that it was especially in this period that excessive images of violence were used in Spanish cinema, associating this use of violence with opposition against Franco's dictatorship (1993: 138). But violence is still predominant in contemporary Spanish films which occur in other completely different social and economical circumstances.

As Barry Jordan and Mark Allinson have pointed out, from the early to mid-1990s there was a transformation of the Spanish cinema industry due to the 'changes in government policy and in new patterns of media consumption and use of leisure time' (2005: 194). According to media scholar Víctor Fernández Blanco, Spanish film production recovered slightly in the 1990s in contrast to a previous trend in which most domestic audience numbers had been decreasing from 1968. In this period Spanish film production decreased by up to 80% (1998: 50). In 1996, with films like *Tesis*, the future started to look more promising. The audience for this film reached over 800,000 spectators and the film earned more than two and a half million euros, an amount that most Spanish films would not normally make at the time<sup>41</sup>.

Taking into account all these different contexts, as my analysis has demonstrated, cinematic violence currently takes many forms and remains a feature of Spanish cinema. This does not imply that Spanish cinema is more violent than American cinema or other national cinemas, moreover, both common

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<sup>41</sup> Data from the film database from the Spanish Ministry of Culture. <http://www.mcu.es/>

characteristics and certain differences from American cinema are found in the way violence is portrayed.

As has been shown, cinematic violence is also a very complex phenomenon, shaped by genre characteristics, narrative, social and ideological dimensions, stylistic choices, industry (different contexts of production), and audiences. All these factors have influenced the films analysed. On the one hand, films which are closer to social cinema depict violence following certain conventions which yield a more realistic portrayal. These films also have the purpose to entertain different types of audiences (e.g. spectators who go to more popular genre films as opposed to those who prefer social films), and, as has been demonstrated, the presence of violence emphasises the dramatic effects in their stories using certain stylistic conventions. The directors here also tend to focus on characters rather than on action, which also has an effect on the representation of violence. For example, in this social cinema directors do not choose spectacular violence but rather, less explicit violence whose main role is social critique in line with the socio-political positions of the film-makers. Such positioning helps us better to understand social issues such as domestic violence towards women and children, or the current situation of immigrants.

On the other hand, Spanish audiences are now offered films closer to the mainstream Hollywood genre films, including popular genres which normally show frequent and spectacular violence: war films, serial killer films and thrillers coexist with more auteurist films in those genres (e.g. *Tesis* versus *Las horas del día*). Some films focus more on the generic features, satisfying audience

expectations and showing spectacular violence typical of these films (*Guerreros*) while others concentrate on characters and the historical period which is portrayed (*Silencio roto*). In addition, in war films violence and memory are intrinsically related, as again they encourage the audience not to forget certain historical events so that they are not repeated. As American novelist Susan Sontag pointed out in her last published book, 'heartlessness and amnesia go together' (2003: 115). Hence, violence also has an educational role in these films, and this should not be ignored.

Additionally, and relatively recently in Spanish cinema, there are genre films which are made exclusively for a certain audience, such as an adolescent audience, the new multiplex generation as Timothy Shary has named it (2002). Most of these genre films imitate American genre films, combining American influences with Spanish and European local references. In these films, portrayals of violence are very graphic and highly stylised, as these genres require spectacular features linked to the spectacular narratives that they normally entail. Closely related to these narratives, it has been demonstrated that the concept of narrative image (Ellis, 1982) also plays a significant role in the depiction of violence. Through the use of explicit or implicit images and words most film posters anticipate the violence that the spectator is going to encounter in the films as well as setting certain genre expectations for the spectator.

With regard to the types of violence which can be found in the films analysed, and following sociologist Hillary Van Soest's classification (1997), individual (physical and psychological violence), structural (also called cultural or

social) and institutional violence appear in most films in this study, however, in different combinations. In social and auteurist films, psychological and structural violence play a more significant role than in genre films, whereas in the latter, spectacular, physical violence is more often present. Structural violence is mainly portrayed in films which deal more explicitly with current social issues. Conversely, structural violence is normally disguised or apparently invisible in genre films in which the narrative, the action and the entertainment become the major purpose of these films.

Aggressors and victims are also portrayed in different ways. In social and auteurist films, both are more realistically and ambiguously portrayed. This is related also to a European tradition which avoids the stereotypical American division of two opposite poles (good versus evil) in characters. This ambiguity is also reflected in the depiction of violence. One of the best examples is the male protagonist in *Te doy mis ojos*, a character who is not presented as an evil protagonist, since the director also focuses on the aggressor's point of view, and not just on the victim's perspective. In contrast, genre films closely imitate the stereotypical portrayal of characters, and therefore, depict less realistic characterisations (*School Killer*). In addition, it is worth mentioning that the male character is normally presented as the aggressor, and the female as a victim (even in films which predominantly show female characters' perspectives). The male point of view is still the predominant one in most of the films analysed, which unfortunately implies violent films continue to support a patriarchal or even misogynistic structure in which the male holds power over females.

All these characteristics mentioned are also intrinsically related to the style of the films. From the beginning of this thesis, I have adopted Stephen Prince's approach in which stylistic analysis is integrated with the social and cultural study of violent films. In social and realist films, the stylistic choices of directors favour a fast-paced action in most violent scenes, but they also integrate stylistic devices which contribute to a more realistic portrayal of violence, such as the use of diegetic sound, the hand-held camera, the use of deep-focus photography, more frequent absence of non-diegetic music, more dialogue, and use of ellipsis to create tension. All these features create a less explicit portrayal of violence in sequences where spectacular scenes are normally avoided. In some of these social cinema films, the portrayal of violence in images which are not seen but heard, also provokes a significant reaction in the spectator without the need to show graphic violence. In contrast, genre films concentrate on the spectacular scenes in which quick montage editing increases tension, slow-motion segments help to focus on the action sequence, and dramatic and orchestral music is used to increase the arousal of the spectator. Nevertheless, in some films where violence is highly stylised and spectacular this is combined with more realistic features such as the hand-held camera, and the use of diegetic sound (*[REC]*).

Finally, it is relevant to mention that humour plays a major role in the portrayal of violence. Humour can mitigate violence, as well as satirise some cultural issues with the use of local stereotypes (*Torrente*). Clearly, stylistic devices as well as humour have an effect on the spectator and although this thesis is not about the effect of violence on the behaviour of Spanish spectators after

watching the films, all of us are aware that violence affects them both positively and negatively. We should not fall into the trap of considering violence as exclusively harmful, since this is a moral evaluation of this concept which has been extensively discussed in different academic fields. As David Trends point out: ‘Interpretations differ among audiences. A violent scene on television will mean different things to each individual, depending on the age, race, religion, ethnicity, personal experiences, attitudes and background of the viewer’ (2007: 123). We, as spectators, should follow these representations of violence and critically discuss all these depictions from different perspectives. Violence is not inherently a negative element of cinema. All representations of violence are motivated by specific and varied factors, some of them nobler than others.

Within the parameters of this project, this focus provides a foundational analysis upon which other analyses might build, looking in more detail, for example, at differences in the production, context and reception of the films. These factors are certainly important, and the analyses set out in this doctoral dissertation offer a starting point from which to explore them. Although I do not claim here to provide absolute explanations for the representations of violence in Spanish cinema, I believe this thesis does provide a valuable starting point from which to explore them further.

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